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#75

BIG 75th

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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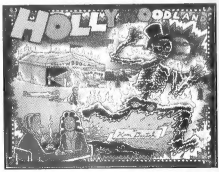

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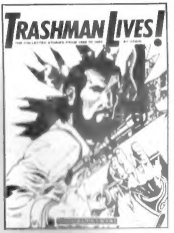

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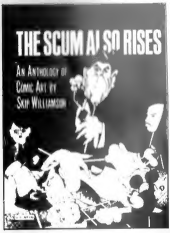

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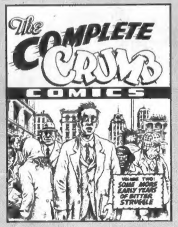

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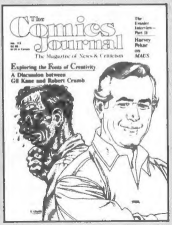

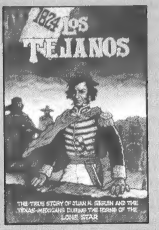

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UP FRONT

If you're among our longtime readers, or have just recently discovered COMICS INTERVIEW, you know that we are unique among periodicals covering the comics scene. We bring you interviews with the pros, by the pros, giving you an inside ear to what the comics industry is saying.

We don't bring you the news about creators playing musical chairs, or which villain Spidey is fighting next month — you can get that in plenty of other places. In fact, **Jim Salicrup** talked me out of an all-purpose comics magazine, convincing me instead to concentrate on interviews and interviews only. And he was right —after all, everybody gets plenty of outside-the-industry commentary in comics fanzines already, so why not just a magazine for the creators and inside-the-industry sorts to talk about comics.

Thus was born COMICS INTERVIEW.

For the main interviews, we chat with comics people in whom everyone is interested — from **John Byrne** to **Stan Lee**, from **Frank Miller** to **Alan Moore.** But we also offer you the kinds of behind-the-scenes interviews you may *never* see anywhere else — visits with publishers, editors, agents and operatives here and abroad, from every area of comics you can imagine (and some you can't!). My goal with

AE BRIAN STELFREEZE

COMICS INTERVIEW is to eventually get around to interviewing everybody involved with comics — past and present, friend or foe, young or old.

That's what makes COMICS INTERVIEW the voice of comics.

From the start, it has always been our intention to offer such comprehensive coverage of the comics field — from top to bottom (creative to business people, past and present) — and from side to side (major and minor comics publishers, with all stops in between, foreign and domestic). Thanks to the cooperation and goodwill of virtually every company and professional in comics, we've been able to keep our word and bring you the kind of interviews no other comics magazine can offer.

Very early on, some said that at the rate we were going, we'd run out of interview subjects in short order. Don't believe it. Here we are in our *seventh* straight year of COMICS INTERVIEW — and we've still only scratched the surface. All told, including this landmark **75th issue**, we've interviewed more than *350 people* in the comics field!

INTERVIEW is unique among comics magazines, the purview of the pros, a place to kick back and enjoy good conversation.

Whether or not you care for the comics work of the folks interviewed here, you can always find a wealth of insight and information in COMICS INTERVIEW. After all, discussions about the skills of writing and drawing, what constitutes good comics, the many and varied influences at play upon different folks in different places working in the same field at the same time . . . these are not topics likely to come up often in the course of common conversation.

That is, unless you count yourself among the fortunate few who spend their lives doing comics for a living. And, even then, the disciplines involved in doing creative work call for a high degree of solitude, so the opportunities to engage in a meaningful exchange of ideas with fellow creators can be few and far between for some.

That's why, first and foremost, COMICS INTERVIEW is a magazine of opinion — the opinions of the people being interviewed, or of those writing letters in response. We don't try to "interpret" or impose our viewpoint on what's being said. My own preference is to produce a magazine that spotlights the joys of comics rather than the dirt. But I regard each interview as a chance for that person to have his or her own say, without being forced to comply with my own views.

In short, whether I agree with what is said or not, I respect the right of each person to express his or her own opinion.

Even if some subjects slant the facts in their favor, a common enough human failing, it would be wrong to rewrite their statements or put words in their mouths . . . and it would run counter to the very nature of COMICS INTERVIEW, which is to bring you actual conversations with people in all walks of comics life and to let you, the reader, judge what they have to say for yourself.

It should therefore come as no surprise that everything said on these pages is, of necessity, biased — but you need look no further than who's doing the talking to find the source. That's the unique elegance and simplicity that INTERVIEW has to offer. We're not pushing a particular editorial agenda of our own, a hidden agenda — we're letting people speak for themselves, whether we agree or not.

There is no shoddy pretense of so-called "objective" journalism. On occasion, that rubs some people the wrong way, but we respect your intelligence and your ability to recognize a self-serving statement when you see one. We are certainly not about to attempt imposing our viewpoint on the people we're interviewing — nor do I think any of you would really want us to, upon reflection.

Of course, in the event of disagreements, the "Last Word" is open to letters arguing, setting the record straight, or just expressing opposing viewpoints. (This issue of INTERVIEW features an especially outspoken letters page.)

Anyway, all the above is what makes COMICS INTERVIEW the forum of preference for the entire comics industry, from writers and artists to publishers, retailers and readers. As our slogan says: "We let the industry speak for itself."

That's the secret of our *seven years* of success.

Of course, you already know that. That's why you read COMICS INTERVIEW — so spread the word. You can count on the fingers of one hand the magazines about comics that have lasted 75 issues.

Long live COMICS INTERVIEW!

-Dan

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"Black and white, that's his costume, that's

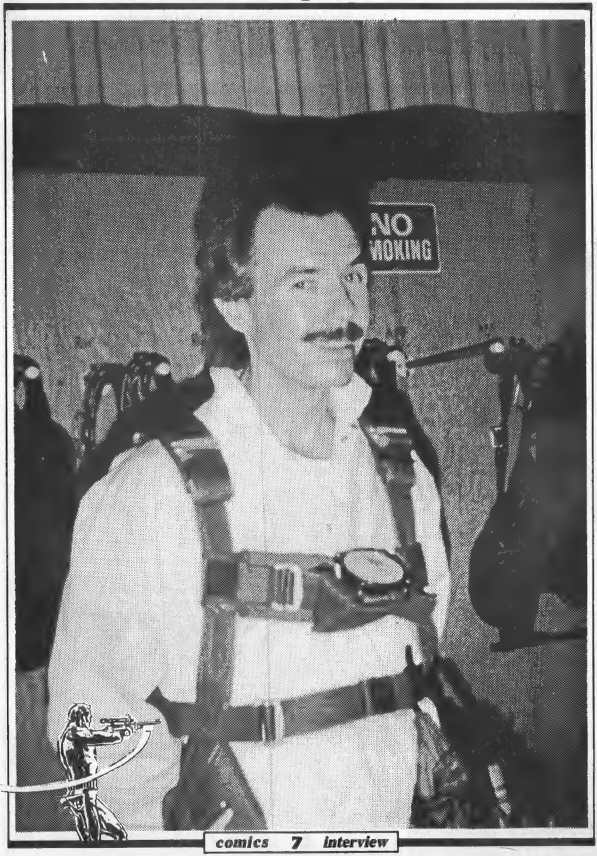
The Punisher has made it to comics stardom during the '80s, but let us not forget the man who created him back in 1973: Gerry Conway. In the midst of a run on SPIDER-MAN, Gerry introduced the grim gangbuster as a pawn of the Jackal, knowing even then he was destined for greater things. He wrote the Punisher's next four appearances, including his first solo story in MARVEL PREVIEW, and from there things just sort of grew. So, here's how the Punisher began, from the man who began him . . .

LOU MOUGIN: *Since we're talking about the Punisher here, let's take it back to 1973, SPIDER-MAN #129, which I guess was the start of the Jackal sequence. The Punisher was introduced in this story, and he was billed on the cover as "The Most Lethal Hired Assassin*

GERRY CONWAY

All artwork accompanying this interview © 1988 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc., unless otherwise noted.

his attitude, that's his point of view on life."



"If you stay outside the law and develop a truly

Ever!" *But in the story, you know, he's presented as an Executioner type, even though the Jackal has hired him. So, first off, how did the Punisher come to be created? And then, was there a conscious effort to change him from an assassin to a dark hero?*

GERRY CONWAY: Well, I was not responsible for the cover copy, so I can't take any credit or blame or whatever. *(Laughter.)* My intention with the character was always to make him a . . . how can I put it? A *complex* character; complex because he saw the world in black and white terms. The world as *most* of us perceive it is *not* black and white. This puts him at odds with people who live in the gray area, like Spider-Man.

I was fascinated by the **Don Pendleton** Executioner character, which was fairly popular at that time, and I wanted to do something that was *inspired* by that, although not to my mind a *copy* of it. And while I was doing the Jackal storyline, the opportunity came for a character who would be *used* by the Jackal to make Spider-Man's life miserable. The Punisher seemed to fit.

LOU: *Yes. It was an interesting character, almost something of a Steve Ditko character in that there is that black-and-white thing which is similar in the Question and Mr. A.*

GERRY: As I say, "Black and white, that's his costume, that's his attitude, that's his point of view on life."

LOU: *Now, Gerry, you say that the Punisher sees the world in black and white terms. How so? In other words, what does he see as "black," as "white," and where does he fit himself into the picture?*

GERRY: The Punisher's view of the world is a simple one — there are good people and there are bad people, and the bad people deserve to die. Some of us might have a problem with that, recognizing that there's a gray area. Almost every "good" person can act in a destructive way at times, and even the worst scum can have a redeeming quality. I think in the Punisher's world-view, redemption isn't possible. I guess he's something of a Calvinist.

LOU: *Where did the idea for the Punisher's costume come from?*

GERRY: When I was creating characters and villains back in the early '70s, I used to sketch a crude costume design for the artist. I guess a lot of comic book writers are frustrated artists. For example, I did the original sketch for Power Girl at DC, for Firelord at Marvel, and so on. I

—AFTER I SEVER OUR LITTLE TIE-UP BY DROPPING ONE WEB—
—SHOOTING OUT A SECOND—
—AND THEN SWINGING UP AND AROUND, WHERE I CAN'T MISS!
ACK— CUTTING OFF MY SHOT?
WHAT DOES OW HERE?
—ACKMAN?
THEN I'M FIGHTING THE X-MEN? BUT WHY?
WHAT IN THE NAME OF J. JONAH JAMESON DO YOU GUYS WA—
WARMPH!!
OKAY, BRIGHT EYES— THAT GETS IT.
YOU WANNA PLAY GAMES— THAT'S WHAT— 'CAUSE WHEN IT COMES TO GAMES
DOC SAVAGE IS COMING!
SOMEBODY ALWAYS WINS!

From MARVEL TEAM-UP 4 -- featuring Spidey and the X-Men -- by Conway, Kane & Mitchell.

isolated viewpoint, it is possible to go berserk."

sketched the basic Punisher costume design, with a small skull on his chest, and a black jumpsuit, and brought it to **John Romita.** I wanted a character whose primary colors would reflect his basic attitude on life — the world is black and white. Light and dark. Quick and dead. John played around with the sketch, and came up with the terrific notion that the Punisher's belt could be part of the skull's jaw. That's a pretty good example of artistic collaboration. John springboarding from my crude little sketch, and doing things I never would have done. The sketch was then sent on to **Ross Andru** with the full script for that issue, and Ross added the hawk-like face, the body build, the physical tension to the character. But it all started with that crude little sketch, I guess.

LOU: *Now, I assume the Punisher is making a good deal of bread for Marvel Comics. Do you wish you had a piece of the action, or even a creative credit?*

GERRY: Sure. In the best of all possible worlds the creator contracts would have been available in 1973; but they weren't and I knew what I was getting into, so I don't blame anybody for taking advantage or anything like that.

LOU: *Did you have any idea that he would spin off into his own series, or have any plans to do that?*

GERRY: Actually, it was pretty obvious from word one that we had a fairly interesting character with a lot of potential. We got *great* mail on him, so we used him again almost immediately, a few months later. A couple of years later, I'm not sure of the exact dates, he got his own magazine, a black-and-white magazine. I was pumping for that almost from the get-go. In fact, when I designed the character, I was thinking of him as a potential spin-off character.

LOU: *Marvel was in one of its big expansionary phases at that time?*

GERRY: Yes. I've always been interested in the loner, the outcast. That's a character that I think is really appropriate to the medium.

LOU: *Right, that vigilante type. It kind of reminds me, when you get right down to it, that a lot of the heroes that we think of as superheroes right now started off in the pulps in the '30s, such as the Shadow and the Spider, which fed right into the early Superman and Batman and such. You could almost say the Punisher is a throwback to that earlier archetype, couldn't you?*

GERRY: Yes, he's a fairly pure character in that sense. One of the reasons I had him come in conflict with Spider-Man right away was because Spider-Man represents the *modern* superhero sensibility, which is "Capture don't kill, hurt don't maim." Even though Spider-Man suffered from a very *similar* story — the back-story in which his Uncle Ben was killed and that's what provoked him to become a superhero — his response to it was very much a comic-book response, and I think appropriately so because Spider-Man is designed primarily for kids.

LOU: *But the Punisher was something to spin-off for an older audience?*

GERRY: Into the black-and-white magazine format.

LOU: *Do you think that the perception of the Punisher as a villain, as an antagonist, perhaps kept the character from really breaking out as a hero?*

GERRY: Well, maybe on the part of the publisher — there was probably a reluctance to commit him to his own book early on, at least in the color format. Although there were other books in which the main character was, shall we say, a little dark and antagonistic — I'm thinking of **Marv Wolfman's** DRACULA, for example. But the Punisher was always popular, when I did him originally for SPIDER-MAN, and later when **Miller** brought him back for DAREDEVIL. So in a way his ascension to his own book seems kind of inevitable.

LOU: *In GIANT-SIZE SPIDER-MAN you got around to having him make verbal entries in his War Journal. How did you get the idea for that?*

GERRY: I didn't want to have him do a lot of thought balloons. *(Laughter.)* And also, another thing which has interested me in comics is the ironic comment; in other words, the comment on the action before or after it takes place. One of the things comics can do, through the use of captions, is comment on what we're seeing. I thought the War Journal would be a really appropriate way to do that. It became one of the more interesting characteristics of the Punisher.

LOU: *And when you take a look at the number of entries in the War Journal, it's evident that he has seen a lot of action, even before we saw him in SPIDER-MAN #129.*

GERRY: That's right. I'm doing a story, a

"You want me, Gerry Conway, writer of Spider-Man and other assorted masterpieces to do an interview in this rag. You're crazy!" Perhaps! . . . but after offering Gerry a free sub, and a date with Vampirella . . . he finally yielded to our wishes and did the interview.

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S
COMICS INTERVIEW

COMICS INTERVIEW #76 -- $3.95 (Canada: $5.25)

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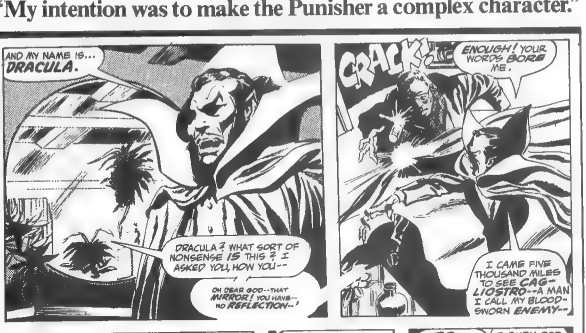
"My intention was to make the Punisher a complex character."


AND MY NAME IS... DRACULA.
DRACULA? WHAT SORT OF NONSENSE IS THIS? I ASKED YOU, HOW YOU--
OH DEAR GOD--THAT MIRROR! YOU HAVE-- NO REFLECTION--!
CRACK
ENOUGH! YOUR WORDS BORE ME.
I CAME FIVE THOUSAND MILES TO SEE CAGLIOSTRO--A MAN I CALL MY BLOOD-SWORN ENEMY--
--AND INSTEAD, I FIND YOU, A SHAM--A CHARLATAN. CAGLIOSTRO WOULD NEVER HAVE FREED THAT GIRL--
HE WOULD HAVE SPRACK--AND FELT THE WARMTH OF HER SWEET BLOOD.
IT WAS JUST A GAME--
A HARMLESS LIE--TO--TO DRAW CROWDS! THAT'S ALL THEY WANT--AN--AN ESCAPE!
I NEVER--EXPECTED-- ANY OF IT TO BE REAL!
WHAT--WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?
DO, MR. KUBBARD?
I BURN FOR CLEAN BLOOD, MR. KUBBARD--
--THAT WITHIN ME IS PROFANED--AND MUST BE REPLACED!

From DRACULA LIVES 1, a Marvel B & W magazine, by Conway, Colan & Palmer (1973).

mini-series for MARVEL PRESENTS, that takes place around War Journal entry #50, which is within six or seven months of when he became the Punisher.

LOU: *I think, due to your leaving Marvel at that time, somewhere around there, you didn't script the Punisher after his MARVEL PREVIEW appearance. He appeared here and there handled by other writers, and then had the mini-series and so on up to the movie that is now being made. Do you have any comments on how the Punisher has been handled by these later hands?*

GERRY: I think they've done a wonderful job. I really enjoyed the mini-series by **Steve Grant** and **Mike Zeck**, it was almost exactly what I would have done if I had been given the opportunity. **Mike Baron** has done a terrific job. I would have liked to have done the book myself, but I wasn't in a position to.

LOU: *Bill Mantlo, in an issue of SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN, had the Punisher go completely around the bend, shooting at people for jay walking, and then be thrown in jail after cracking up. Later Steven Grant explained that away by saying someone had drugged the Punisher's food. But what were your feelings about Mantlo's interpretation of the character.*

GERRY: Well, I think Bill saw the character one way, and I saw it differently. *(Laughter.)* I don't think it . . how can I put this? *(Pause.)* I think in the real world Bill's extrapolation of the Punisher *probably* would be pretty accurate. If you stay outside the law that long and develop a *truly* isolated viewpoint towards the world, towards society, it is possible to go berserk. But within the context of a superhero comic book I thought it was far too radical a jump, and I'm glad that Steve brought it back to something more usable.

LOU: *Well, the thing that got me was, basically, that the Punisher did an awfully stupid thing in that story. He goes to kill the Kingpin, but he lets the Kingpin turn on the lights when he comes in the room and he's standing there in full view with his weapon pointing at the ceiling and the safety isn't off. Isn't that kind of silly?*

GERRY: I don't remember it. Sometimes when a story goes from plot to art there are little jumps in logic that just show up.

LOU: *I know, but that one really got me*

"I think that is a bit of a negation of his loner status."

at the time. What did you think of Frank Miller's interpretation of the Punisher?

GERRY: I thought **Miller** did a fabulous job, I have never had any problems with what **Miller** does. I sometimes disagree with some of his political points of view — *(Laughter.)* But I don't denigrate his talent at all.

LOU: *Where does the Punisher stand on censorship?*

GERRY: I don't think his thoughts go in that direction. He's concerned with "the real world" as he sees it, in which people live and die violently, in a war that isn't about truth so much as it's about survival and innocence. His dream of a normal life was shattered beyond recovery, in his view, and now he exists simply to wreak vengeance on those responsible for the final destruction of his innocence. Censorship doesn't enter into it. What you say is irrelevant to a man like him; it's what you do that matters, and what you do had better be righteous.

LOU: *If suddenly the Marvel Universe changed radically and things worked the way the Punisher thinks they should, what would that be like?*

GERRY: Tense.

LOU: *What would the Punisher be in such a world?*

GERRY: Very tense.

LOU: *Who do you see the Punisher as? I mean, what would you classify him as psychologically?*

GERRY: How do you mean?

LOU: *How do you see the Punisher, the way his head works, besides the black-and-white mechanism? That was the way he dealt with his pain, of course, but it seemed like he shut off part of himself after his family was killed, almost by accident.*

GERRY: I think he is a very lonely individual. One of the things that I *don't* necessarily like in the new PUNISHER series is that he has a group of people around him. That's a bit of a negation of his loner status. But I can understand why it's done, because there's always the problem of "How are you going to get the plot across, who is he going to talk to?" *(Laughter.)* To me it's intrinsic to the character that he is a guy who is broken, and as such has real *difficulty* making any human connections. But that's when he was a character who appeared as an antagonist, and it may be that the necessity to broaden his character requires that group around him. But it just seemed to me that the current creative

"It's intrinsic to the character that he is broken."

team was too *quick* to give him a "family."

I probably would have handled it this way: The people surrounding him would be people that were trying to get him, rather than people who were trying to help him. And the character growth that *I* would have worked with, over a period of a couple of years, would have been his slowly coming out of his shell and coming back *into* society, and possibly coming to the conclusion that there's something wrong with what he's been doing. *(Laughter.)* Whether that would then lead to him changing and going in another direction, I don't know

LOU: *It seems to me that the Punisher really isn't either a hero or a villain, but a victim striking back. Shouldn't that really be considered the essence of the Punisher, that he is a victim first and foremost, and do you think that this has been lost on any of the people who have handled him after you?*

GERRY: I don't know if he is a victim, although his origin is certainly tragic. Things happen in life, and what matters is how an individual responds to events, not always the events themselves. The man whose son is kidnapped and killed by a child molester can either become a vigilante, or commit himself to public actions on behalf of lost children, or find meaning in a commitment to his own family, or have any number of other reactions. I like what I see Mike and the other writers doing with the character, and I like what I do with him, too.

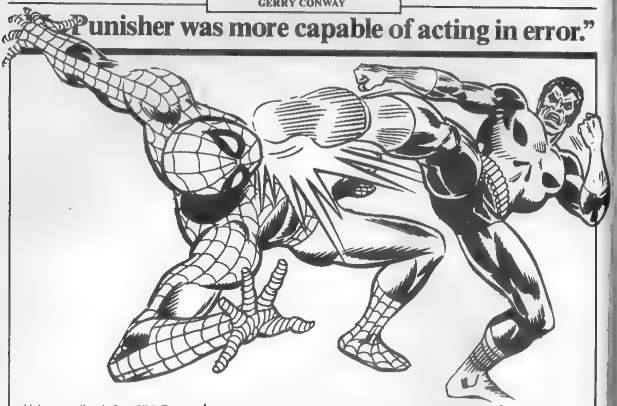
LOU: *Why do you think the dark hero, the killer type, has risen in popularity so much lately? Is it a particularly viable symbol for the world today, do you think?*

GERRY: The dark villain reflects a nihilistic view of life that I'm not sure I'm particularly comfortable with myself. As I've said, the Punisher was conceived originally as an antagonist rather than a protagonist

LOU: *Do you think thematically that there's a line that you could draw from, say, Nick Fury and Conan through Jonah Hex and the Punisher on to Wolverine, Rorschach, THE DARK KNIGHT, and some of the other killer heroes that have become prevalent in modern comics — a line of violent heroics?*

GERRY: Sure. You *could* put in some of the BATMAN stories from that period, too — I was *definitely* influenced by **Denny O'Neil's** BATMAN. I wouldn't use Conan or Jonah Hex at all, but I

"Punisher was more capable of acting in error."



think it goes directly from Nick Fury to the Punisher to DAREDEVIL by **Frank Miller.** I like the fact that some of the most intense DAREDEVIL stories **Frank Miller** did were structured around the Punisher character.

LOU: *Well, the Punisher is the first modern Marvel hero to be a killer, excluding Nick Fury in S.H.I.E.L.D. — and when I say modern, I'm talking about a contemporary character from the 1960s on, not like Sgt. Fury or Conan, or Jonah Hex at DC. Did you get any flak about his killing crooks rather than capturing them?*

GERRY: No, because *initially, until* he got his own book with MARVEL PREVIEW, he never actually was a hero. I mean, he never was the protagonist of the story, he was always the *antagonist.* So theoretically — even though I didn't perceive him that way — theoretically he was a villain, and villains *can* kill.

When he came back in his own series, I believe that was one of the first things they wanted to deal with — if he did kill it had to be *clear* that the people he killed *deserved* to die. If there's a difference between their Punisher and my Punisher — and I don't think there's *much* of a difference — it's that, because of the requirements of the Punisher being the protagonist, they've taken to making him much more certain in his choices than I would have. In other words, my Punisher was more capable of acting in error.

LOU: *Right, and that's the danger of vigilantism, the risk of killing the wrong person.*

GERRY: Right. You can't do that if you're making him the protagonist. That's appropriate when he's appearing in *another* character's story as an antagonistic character, but when you make him a protagonist then he *must* act in an appropriate manner.

LOU: *But then there's always that problem of trying to find a recurring villain, because when he goes up against somebody it's usually to kill.*

GERRY: Yeah. Well, if you perceive him as having supernatural powers of success — *(Laughter.)* For myself, I think it's more interesting when he fails. I like a bittersweet ironic ending.

LOU: *If Gerry Conway decided to give the Punisher a sidekick, what would he come up with?*

GERRY: A small cuddly dog with very sharp teeth, named Buster.

"Everybody in Belgium and France knows Tintin from age four."

THIERRY SMOLDEREN

Taking refuge in Le Criterion, a "typically Belgian" restaurant in the uptown Ixelles area of Brussels, on a crisp autumn day, we settled in for what proved to be a delightful and enlightening evening. A teacher of comics history and a Belgian by birth — not to mention a freelance writer and comics critic — Terry Smolderen has ideal

"Herge was the main force to begin a

credentials to write the biography of Herge, creator of Tintin, perhaps the most influential character of the European comics world. Terry began by telling us about his project of the past three years, then proceeded to explain the importance of Herge, and the state of the French and Belgian comics industry at large...

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Thierry Smolderen
Born: 25 November 1954 in Brussels, Belgium
Occupation: Comics: Journalism, Criticism, Selling of Originals, Script Writing — everything except drawing
Credits: Many articles in LES CAHIERS DE LA BANDES DESSINEES (bandes designes, bands of design, means comics), this is the biggest magazine about comics, something like COMICS REVUE and COMICS INTERVIEW and COMICS JOURNAL combined; a book about Milton Caniff, IMAGES DE CHINE, which is like an art book; a book about some cryptic and inexplicable coincidences between stories by Herge and Moebius, LES CARNETS VOLES DU MAJOR (THE STOLEN BOOKS OF THE MAJOR), HERGE PORTRAIT BIOGRAPHIQUE with Peirre Sterckx, a biography of Herge told as in a novel; HYBRIDES and HYBRIDES PART 2: ORION (drawn by Seraphine); I am writing the third HYBRIDES now
Favorite Subject Matters: Moebius; McCay; Herge; Caniff
Favorite Material in Comics: At the moment what Frank Miller, Howard Chaykin, Bill Sienkiewicz and Alan Moore are doing. AKIRA by Katsuhiro Otomo, and LONE WOLF AND CUB by Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima. Of course, I am very much in contact with everything that's published in Europe, and perhaps I am not very much interested in it because it goes in me... more like I am a sponge. I don't have to read it with a lot of interest to know what happens. I am much more intensely looking at things happening in other countries.

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT: *How long have you been involved in comics?*
THIERRY SMOLDEREN: My first name was chosen because my father was a big fan of TERRY AND THE PIRATES; it shows I have been interested in comics for a long long time. I started to really work in the field on a main basis

TERRY AND THE PIRATES
by MILTON CANIFF
WHERE'S YOUR PAL, DUNKAN, THE CORRESPONDENT, TERRY?
IN THE REAR...
WHAT'S THIS ABOUT A PRIVATE WAR BETWEEN YOU TWO? DON'T YOU KNOW DUNKAN'S A NON-COMBATANT?
IT'S NOT IMPORTANT - BUT IF I HAD KNOWN HE WAS GOING TO INDIA ON THIS FLIGHT, I'D HAVE WAITED FOR THE NEXT...
OH, NO, YOU WOULDN'T! IF COL. CORKIN SENT FOR YOU AND HEARD YOU DIDN'T TAKE THE FIRST AIRPLANE OUT - HE'D HAVE YOU ON THE RACK!
HEY - THERE'S THE STUFF - THE WEATHER JOCKERS TOLD US HE MIGHT CATCH IN THE HILLS...
I'LL TAKE IT, RAY... WE'LL GO AROUND EAST... MUCH AS I'D LIKE TO STROP THOSE JAP 'DROWES' TO THE WEST, THIS IS NOT THAT KIND OF MISSION...
INTELLIGENCE SAID THEY HAVE BEEN QUIET OVER EAST... PROBABLY NOTHING IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO KEEP A PATROL UP...
MEANWHILE...
SINGLE ENGINED UNFRIENDLY AIRCRAFT AT 8,000 FEET! BEARING: TWO 6'R ZERO; DISTANCE: 50 MILES, SPEED: 210 M.P.H.
THAT IS NOT A YANKEE TRANSPORT - IT MUST BE A PHOTO AIRCRAFT! THEY MUST NOT GET PICTURES OF THE ARTILLERY MOVING THROUGH THE PASS!
AREN'T WE CHANGING COURSE?
YES, MR. DUNKAN... WE'RE GOING AROUND A STORM... IT'LL ONLY BE ABOUT 100 MILES OUT OF OUR WAY!
I GUESS DUNKAN DOESN'T LIKE OUR LUXURIOUSLY UPHOLSTERED AMMUNITION BOXES BACK THERE!
WE'LL CUT THROUGH THE PASS... IF THE JAPS HAVE RADAR ON THE RIDGE, WE MAY AVOID ALERTING THE NEXT VALLEY... HEY! WHAT'S THAT?

© 1944 News Syndicate Co., Inc.

Milton Caniff's TERRY AND THE PIRATES (1944).

comics culture that is special to Europe."

© 1988 Smolderen/Sterckx

five or six years ago, but I have been very conscious of comics culture since I was seven or eight. When I was 11 I read a book about an exhibition that was being done about American comics I know the book by heart because I learned it when I was 12, because I was very interested in the history of the comics, more the Golden Age of American comics, before the War.

DAK: *When you're in Belgium and you're growing up, what comic books do you read? What is it like to grow up with comics here, what types of material do you read and so on?*

TERRY: It's very easy to answer that question because it's spelled **Herge.** (Herge was the pseudonym of **Georges Remi** and is the reversal of his initials as they are pronounced in French) It's been four generations now that parents are giving to their children the books by **Herge** as the first book you are supposed to read or to look at.

JULIA MATHER: *And the most famous one of those is TINTIN?*

TERRY: Yes, it's TINTIN. Everybody in Belgium and France knows Tintin from age four

JULIA: *What else did Herge do?*

TERRY: There are two other series; QUICK ET FLUPKE, the story of two cats in Brussels living in the streets and doing like the Katzenjammer Kids, you know; and the other one was JO, ZETTE AND JOCKO, the story of two little kids, brother and sister, and a monkey But people here know the stories of Tintin by heart. I mean you have people throwing things off Tintin at each other — "Where did he say that, what page in which adventure?"

DAK: *And for most of the Americans who would be unfamiliar with it, what age group would you say the books are directed at?*

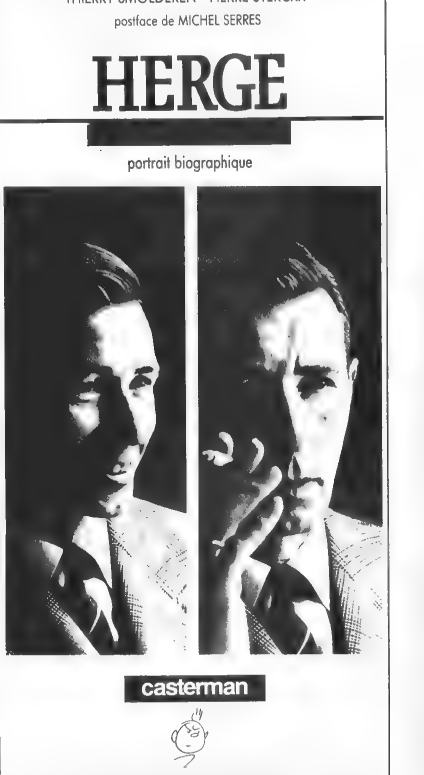
TERRY: TINTIN?

DAK: *Yeah. Is it something that you grow out of in the way American readers might perhaps grow out of superheroes?*

TERRY: No. It's more something like — it's nothing *like* it — but from that angle it's more like PEANUTS. It's something that you can read at four or five just for the fun of looking at the little dog, and then you laugh your head off at 50 because it's very . . filled with the living. That's more like it. And people of 60 who know Tintin since 1929, they love it as they love it at 12 or five!

DAK: *That accounts for the wide readership.*

TERRY: Yeah. I think **Herge** was probably the main force in Europe to begin a



Book cover on the life of HERGE, creator of TINTIN (by Smolderen & Sterckx).

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"Stylistically TINTIN has influenced a lot of artists."

© 1954 United Feature Syndicate

One of the very earliest PEANUTS strips (10/10/54) by Charles Schulz.

comics culture that is special to Europe.

DAK: *And he was Belgian?*

TERRY: Yeah, he was Belgian — so there is a *very* big school of Belgian artists but internationally they are considered more like French, because it's a bit indistinct the separation. But the *bigger* names are Belgian, actually. In the '40s and '50s and '60s the bigger names were Belgian, and then in the '70s began a wave of French artists and now it's balanced between Belgium and France.

JULIA: *And all of them more or less count Herge as their guru?*

TERRY: Yes, yes! **Herge** is very at the core of all this, yes.

DAK: *So if we were searching for an approximate equivalent, would you say he was the Jack Kirby of European comics?*

TERRY: mmm — I think he's *much* bigger than that.

DAK: *But in the sense of being influential, in that way?*

TERRY: Yeah, but much bigger than

© 1999 Casterman / Herge

Voici la salle d'école... Là, au centre c'est notre chapelle... Lorsque nous nous sommes installés ici, il y a un an, c'était la brousse...
Quels as, ces missionnaires!...
C'est vraiment ennuyeux... Je dois faire ma visite à l'hôpital... Et les autres Pères sont absents... Que faire?...

Also from the early years — Herge's TINTIN.

"Eventually comics will give way to

that

DAK: *On a larger scale, along with PEANUTS?*

TERRY: Yeah.

JULIA: *And he wrote and drew all of the Tintin things.*

TERRY: Yeah, with help — it's not very widely known — but with help from people. The script, the writing of the story, he was helped, although there is no credit about it in the books that he was helped. But *not* very much! More like in the work of brainstorming, you know.

DAK: *How many books are there in the TINTIN series?*

TERRY: Twenty-three.

DAK: *When I say "series," that's loose — they're not continued like in American comics.*

TERRY: No, no. There are 23 books, they are 62 pages, every book, and around 15 images by page; so it's more like three or four comic books for each book, and two or three of the adventures are taking two books at that length, so the stories are very long.

DAK: *And you pointed out as we were walking to the restaurant, through — what section are we in?*

TERRY: Ixelles, which is part of Brussels — it's called uptown.

DAK: *You were pointing out in the windows the various Tintin T-shirts and so on. Would you say the merchandising of the image of Tintin is as popular here as Snoopy or —*

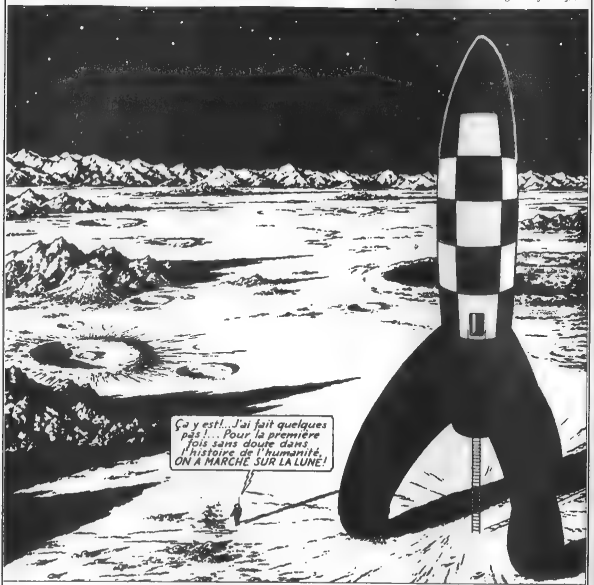
TERRY: No, no, no, no, not for the merchandising itself. The image, the head of Tintin, is recognized everywhere, as in the PEANUTS where people see and know it's Charlie Brown.

JULIA: *I remember having TINTIN in England when we were children, but we only really had the animated cartoons.*

TERRY: They were pretty awful. *(Laughter.)*

JULIA: *Yes!*

DAK: *We were watching a bit of them just*



© 1989 Hergé/Casterman

Herge's TINTIN from 1954, 15 years before the U.S. landed on the moon.

other mediums, image mediums."

WHY ARE YOU GETTING ALL FIXED UP DEAR?
I EXPECT A COMMITTEE HERE THIS EVENING — THEY ARE DUE ANY MINUTE
SAY CLIF, I'M THE NEW CONGRESSMAN FROM THIS DISTRICT AN' I HEAR YOU AIN'T GOT TO TALK TO YOUR TURKEY!
YES, SIR!
CLOSE THE MAIN DOOR — I DON'T CARE FER OPERA, I'M A MOVIN' PICTURE FAN —
WHAT'S THE MATTER FRIENDS?
WOW!
I'VE GOT ME GANG HERE FER THE SOONER WE GET TO WORK THE BETTER —
I KNOW BUT WE'D BETTER GO IN THE NEXT ROOM AS WE CAN'T SEE YOU PROPERLY AT YOU —
WELL-RO ARE YOU WHO US —
WE MUST AS GOOD AS ELECTED WITH US SEEMING TROUBLE!
WELL-EE — AH'M YOU SEE
WHAT'S THE SHOUT SOME CHATTER 'N-RO —
WELL ALL DR. BOSON PALS
CLOSE ME JUST A MINUTE'S GENTLEMEN
7
8
9
9

From 1918, George McManus' THEIR ONLY CHILD.

before we came across on the ferry. I was wondering how you felt that translated the books?

TERRY: The cartoons?

DAK: *Yeah. And what period are they from?*

TERRY: I think they made them at the end of the '50s, in England, and they are pretty bad, they are lame.

DAK: *They reminded me of American cartoons, which I think we can say are considerably lame.*

TERRY: Yeah. *(Laughter.)* He never took an interest in it, **Herge.** He never took any interest in the cartoons.

JULIA: *We noticed a lot of the frames held on the same picture for a long period of time — which makes animation a lot cheaper.*

TERRY: Yeah.

DAK: *But stylistically I thought they were interesting.*

TERRY: Yeah. The main influence on **Herge's** style was, I think, **George McManus,** BRINGING UP FATHER, you know. I think **Herge** saw pages from BRINGING UP FATHER in the late '20s, and the head of Tintin is very . . . it's style is from **George McManus.** But as for the stories of Tintin, I think that the nearest American to relate to it, go *nearest* to the stories, probably the Mickey Mouse stories that **Floyd Gottfredson** did in the '30s and '40s; that same kind of spirit. But much *longer* stories because they weren't serialized in the daily papers. They were serialized in weekly magazines, two page every week, and one story could run through one year.

JULIA: *And you could say in Brussels the head of Tintin is as recognizable as the head of Mickey Mouse is to America.*

TERRY: Yeah, absolutely, yeah.

DAK: *And it was serialized in weekly magazines, two pages at a time?*

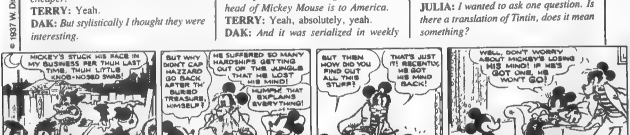
TERRY: Yeah, the magazine is called TINTIN according to the name of the hero; it was done after the War. In 1946 they began to print a magazine with Tintin — they print the most *popular* of the stories — that's still very much alive now.

DAK: *But there are only two pages of actual Tintin comics in each and the rest of the issue has other material?*

TERRY: Yeah, in that format. **Herge** at that time had published *most* of his work, actually, so he was very slow at producing them. I don't know if we have to stick to **Herge** through the whole thing, but he is very influential!

DAK: *I think it's important because some of our readers aren't familiar with it, what the importance of the material really is.*

JULIA: *I wanted to ask one question. Is there a translation of Tintin, does it mean something?*


MICKEY'S STUCK HIS FACE IN MY BUSINESS PER THUH LAST TIME, THUH LITTLE KNOB-NOSED SNOOP!
BUT WHY DON'T CAP HAZZARD GO BACK AFTER TH' BURRO TREASURE HIMSELF?
HE SUFFERED SO MANY HARDSHIPS GETTING OUT OF THIS JUNGLE — THAT'S HE LOST HIS MIND!
I THINKING THAT EXPLAINS EVERYTHING!
BUT THEN HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ALL THIS STUFF?
THAT'S JUST IT! RECENTLY HE GOT HIS MIND BACK!
WELL, DON'T WORRY ABOUT MICKEY'S LOSING HIS MIND! IF HE'S GOT ONE, HE WON'T GO!
WALT DISNEY

Floyd "WALT DISNEY" Gottfredson drew this Mickey Mouse strip for 4/13/37 publication.

© 1918 George McManus
© 1937 W. Disney

"Winsor McCay anticipated lots of

TERRY: No, it's just a name: just for the phonetics, I think — just for the sound of it.

DAK: *And did the creation... I don't want to say "die" because it's obviously still popular today, but sometimes there's a tradition of continuing a successful character beyond its creator —*

TERRY: They stopped.

DAK: *So there's nobody doing pastiches?*

TERRY: No, no. A lot of pastiches in a funny way, I mean in an imaginary way —

JULIA: *But they can't do Tintin.*

TERRY: No, they can't. They would be flying to disaster! *(Laughter.)* No, there are 23 adventures, and a 24th that Herge was doing just before he died. That's been published recently in book form as a sketch, you know. The sketches were published, very expensive and very successful!

DAK: *It's interesting that the character was popular enough that two pages in a magazine were enough to sustain a readership. It's difficult to imagine a character in the States being popular enough that two pages an issue would sustain it.*

TERRY: Yeah, it had a very big impact in 1946. But you ask me how the big public get into contact with comics in Belgium and in France, it's through magazines like TINTIN, PILOTE, SPIROU, which is another character very very popular. Through those magazines. They were weekly through the '40s, '50s, '60s, then they come to be more monthly, you know, some of them changed their frequency. But everybody who is over 20 years old now in Belgium has read TINTIN or SPIROU or PILOTE as a child.

DAK: *Are comics here more international maybe than they are in the States? For instance, in addition to local material would there be any comics like MICKEY MOUSE or Japanese comics or anything?*

TERRY: American comics, yes, but only... well, Mickey Mouse is very well known, there is a weekly magazine which

is called MICKEY, which is full of Disney material. That's one of the things that the kids read normally, that magazine. But other American material is much more through the newspapers, the comic strips, like PEANUTS, RIP KIRBY, THE PHANTOM, MANDRAKE, things like that.

DAK: *Is this new material or are they reprinting?*

TERRY: It's new material. Well, perhaps five years old, but it's not old material from the '30s. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Well, how would you describe the comics industry today in Belgium and in France? Is it increasing in popularity, decreasing?*

TERRY: It depends. If you are looking at 1988 since 1978, it's *much* bigger now than it was ten years ago. But it was much bigger in 1984 than it is now. It's gone down a little bit. But it's gone very far, it's been very very big. They are publishing 800 books every year in the comics form, and when I say books it's a hardcover book of 46 pages.

DAK: *At an approximate price if you translated it to dollars, what would it be on average per book?*

TERRY: *(Pause.)* Something like $8.00 or $10.00, normal. There are 800 new titles around that price.

DAK: *I wonder, when you consider how much Marvel and DC publish, they average maybe 50 to 55 different comics a month, so they're each doing 600 to 700 comics per year, and they each have approximately a third of the market and the rest of us have the other third, and the independents have more titles but they're not selling as many — so it might be that it's just a whole different format and a whole different way of thinking about these things. But Jean-Marc Lofficier told me that last year in France there was basically at least one new album every single day —*

TERRY: Yeah, two! If it's 800 — but it's been reduced. At the peak in 1984 and 1985 it was 800. It has been going down a little bit since

DAK: *And this is all new material?*

TERRY: Yeah

DAK: *Not counting keeping TINTIN in print?*

TERRY: No.

JULIA: *What is quite amazing is that it takes a year-and-a-half for an artist to make one book and they're bringing out two a day.*

DAK: *A lot of artists have been working a lot of years.*

TERRY: Yeah, but most of those books are still available in the book shops, they are not forgotten and disposed of as comic books are. I don't say they print them again and again, but.

JULIA: *They don't go off sale because they're out of date.*

TERRY: Yeah. They can still get them through the publisher except for those which are sold out.

DAK: *Would you say that they sell as well as straight hardcover fiction here?*

TERRY: Much bigger! When people working in book — normal book I mean

DIANA, MARRY SOMEONE ELSE?
YOU KNOW HOW WOMEN ARE. JUNGLE'S QUIET NOW. NO TROUBLE. WHY NOT VISIT HER?
GOOD IDEA! COME ON, DEVIL!
WILSON McCOY 11-11
GO, HERO!
SPLASH
THE THOUGHT OF ANOTHER MAN DID IT. THE MIGHTY PHANTOM, GHOST WHO WALKS, RULER OF THE JUNGLE IS AS ALL OF US, FORTUNATELY
© 1988 King Features Syndicate, Inc.

THE PHANTOM by Wilson McCoy (1958).

© 1989 Tod Benoit

things that are happening now!"

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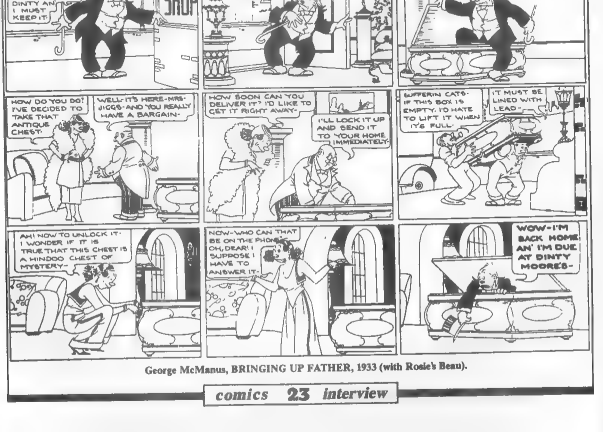
The "clear-line" look of Winsor McCay's LITTLE NEMO IN SLUMBERLAND.

now, not graphic novel: I say graphic novel because it's your term that is equivalent — are looking at the sales of the graphic novels here, they are very jealous. You can start your career at 20 doing a character and doing your story and sell 25,000 books, which is not big when you look at the American market but you must remember the price of each book, so it's quite a big market for the author. The average author can have 15,000 or 25,000 books, he can sell it, while in the normal book except for the best-seller they are very happy when they sell 7,000.

JULIA: *Do you think that the transition*


BY GOLLY-HERE COMES MAGGIE-SHE MUSTN'T SEE ME-I'VE GOT A DATE WITH DINTY AND I MUST KEEP IT!
ANTIQUE SHOP
I'LL JUST SLIP IN HERE UNTIL SHE GOES BY-
BY GOLLY SHE'S COMIN IN HERE-I'LL JUST HIDE IN THIS CHEST!
HOW DO YOU DO! I'VE DECIDED TO TAKE THAT ANTIQUE CHEST!
WELL-IT'S HERE-MISS JIGGS AND YOU REALLY HAVE A BARGAIN!
HOW SOON CAN YOU DELIVER IT? I'D LIKE TO GET IT RIGHT AWAY!
I'LL LOCK IT UP AND SEND IT TO YOUR HOME IMMEDIATELY!
SUPPOSIN CATCH THIS BOX IS EMPTY, I'D HATE TO LIFT IT WHEN IT'S FULL!
IT MUST BE LINED WITH LEAD!
AH! NOW TO UNLOCK IT! I WONDER IF IT IS TRUE THAT THIS CHEST IS A HINDOO CHEST OF MYSTERY!
NOW-WHO CAN THAT BE ON THE PHONE, OH, DEAR! I SUPPOSE I HAVE TO ANSWER IT!
WOW-I'M BACK HOME AN' I'M DUE AT DINTY MOORES!

© 1933 George McManus

George McManus, BRINGING UP FATHER, 1933 (with Rosie's Beau).

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"It's an intellectual thing to read comics."

from that into a more visual book is because we're moving into a more visual age, with computers and videos — that people want to look at pictures that are less boring in some way than just reading page after page of writing?

TERRY: Yeah.

DAK: *And before that how was the comics industry?*

TERRY: Before that?

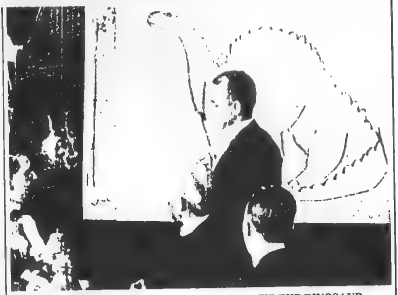
DAK: *Yeah. Has it always been so popular?*

TERRY: No, it took a very long time to take off. During the '40s and '50s and '60s the big publishers were putting out magazines like TINTIN, a handful of them, and the *best* series, the series that were most attractive for the public, they published it in book form, copying **Herge** actually. It was **Herge** who introduced *that* form of book, hardcover and of around 50 page every book.

JULIA: *And the books that are coming out now two a day, are they all in very similar styles to TINTIN?*

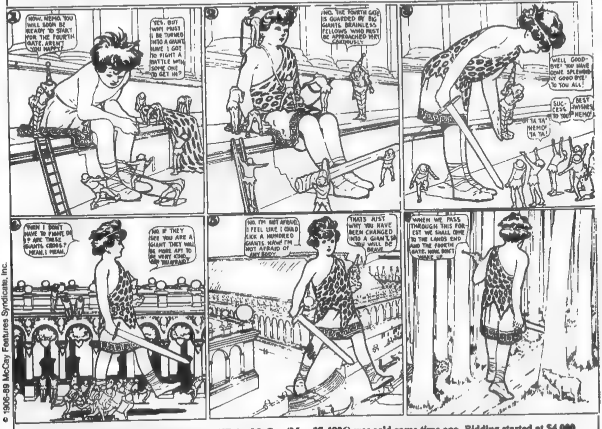
TERRY: No, no. It's difficult to say because . . . *(short laugh)* . . . because perhaps to your eyes it would look similar

DAK: *The way all American comics look the same sometimes?*



Winsor McCay and his animated creation GERTIE THE DINOSAUR.

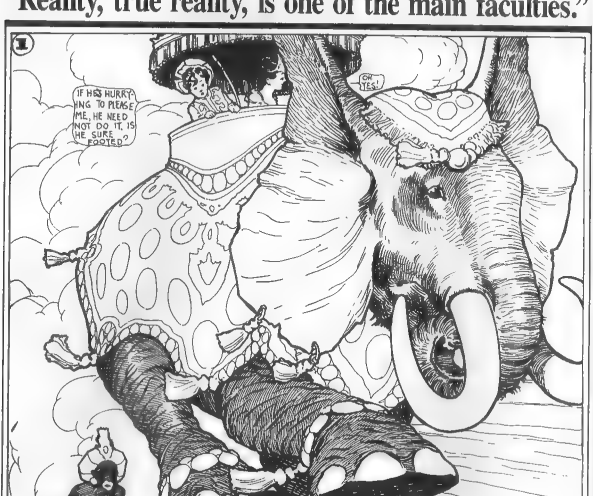
TERRY: Yeah. But stylistically TINTIN has influenced a lot of artists, but they were stylish *hip* people copying **Herge** for cultural attachment to Tintin. They called this style of drawing, which actually came from **George McManus** and **Winsor McCay** perhaps, this type of drawing they


WOW, NEMO, YOU WILL HAVE TO BEGIN TO START FROM THE FOURTH GATE, AREN'T YOU HAPPY?
YES, BUT WHY MUST I BE TURNED INTO A GIANT, SINCE I GOT TO FIGHT A BATTLE WITH SOME ONE SO BIG?
HO, THE FOURTH GATE! CONGRATULATIONS, LITTLE PRINCE, ON ATTAINING THIS DISTINCTION! YOU ARE THE FIRST FELLOWS WHO HAVE SO APPROACHED THIS CASTLE!
WELL, GOOD-BYE! THE HOUR GRAND SPLENDOR! GOOD-BYE TO YOU ALL!
SEE! ANYBODY WITH THE NAME OF NEMO?
NEMO IS YOU!
WHEN I DON'T HAVE TO PAINT IN 3 D ANY MORE, THANK GOODNESS! MEANS, I MEAN,
NO, IF THEY HAVE YOU ARE A GIANT! THEY WILL BE MORE APT TO DO WHAT THEY WISH!
OH, I'M NOT AFRAID, I FEEL LIKE I COULD KICK A HUNDRED GIANTS! WHAT I'M NOT AFRAID OF IS NOT BEING—
THAT'S JUST WHY YOU HAVE BEEN CHANGED INTO A GIANT, SO YOU WILL BE BRAVE.
WHEN WE PASS THROUGH THIS FOREST WE SHALL COME TO THE LANDS WHO RAN THE FAIRY GATE, WHO DON'T KNOW OF

© 1906-89 McCay Features Syndicate, Inc.

This LITTLE NEMO IN SLUMBERLAND by McCay (May 27, 1906) was sold some time ago. Bidding started at $4,000

"Reality, true reality, is one of the main faculties."



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LITTLE NEMO IN SLUMBERLAND from Sept. 1906 (McCay).

call it "clear line." It's the name of the style in Europe and there are a lot of artists trying clear line, you know; but that term is not very precise, difficult to define, and I have a lot of problems to define it to the student when I give lessons on comics.

JULIA: *But it's completely different from something like LONE WOLF where it's this wild kind of brushwork?*

TERRY: It's very precise and studious — how you say that?

JULIA: *Painstaking.*

TERRY: Painstaking, yeah.

DAK: *Do you teach at a college?*

TERRY: Yeah, I teach the history of comics.

DAK: *What sort of reception does that get?*

TERRY: Very good. It's preferred to mathematics or statistics. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *How do you quiz people on such things, though? How do you grade people?*

TERRY: I ask questions about the history: What were the trends in comics in America in the 1920s or 1930s? Who was

"There are a lot of specialized book stores in France & Belgium."

the creator of LITTLE NEMO and what was his life like?

JULIA: *So COMICS INTERVIEW is applied reading for your students!* (Laughter.)

TERRY: It should be, yes.

DAK: *I was going to ask if there is a text. Is it the text that you wrote on the history of comics that you use to teach?*

TERRY: Not really. There is a syllabus, like 30 or 40 pages.

DAK: *Do they get to see different samples of artwork and so on?*

TERRY: Yeah, on the slides. We intend to — I say "we" because I give those lessons with **Thierry Groensteen,** the chief editor of LES CAHIERS DE LA BANDES DESSINEES; he's giving the lessons not *with* me but to different classes in parallel —

JULIA: *Is that within an art school or an art college?*

TERRY: A school for journalism and publicity, advertisement.

(Dinner break.)

DAK: *The distribution over here, is it returnable distribution or is it all-sales-are-final?*

TERRY: It depends, they have both going through the same channels. As far as I know some of the books are not returnable, some of them are. There are a lot of limited editions. You had DARK KNIGHT in the limited edition with the signature, it has been *copied* from the European market where there is a limited edition for every book. *Not* for *every* book but for perhaps a third of the books that are produced now, I don't know — but a good proportion of the books that are going out now have a limited edition going at the same time that the normal edition.

DAK: *Are those distributed to book stores? How are they —*

TERRY: Yeah, specialized book stores. There are a lot of specialized book stores in France and in Belgium — there are 30 or 40 in Brussels — and they like to have that kind of edition because they make a big margin on those books. Those books sell at around $40.00, you know, with the signature of the author and the numbered edition.

DAK: *Do you have to subscribe to that in advance or do you just go into the shop and hope to find them?*

TERRY: Yeah, you go to the shop and hope to find them.

JULIA: *In the States and also in London there's a pretty good collectors market where books will go up and up and people will collect them and go to conventions and swap them and so on — does that hap-*

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QU'EST-CE QU'ELLE ME VEUT? NE LA LAISSE PAS APPROCHER...QU'EST-CE...
PETIT D'HOMME, JE TE VOLE TON COEUR AFIN DE NE L'OUBLIER JAMAIS SON SANG ET LE PARFUM DE TA PEUR SONT LES DANS MON COEUR DESORMAIS.

HYBRIDES . . . illustrated by Seraphine (story by Smolderen).

"European comics come from the

LIEUTENANT BLUEBERRY by Moebius, soon to be reprinted by Marvel Comics (multi-volumed).

pen here?

TERRY: Yeah, a lot.

JULIA: *Does a limited edition rise quickly?*

TERRY: Yeah, very quickly for some. **Moebius** was the first, actually, to really see a big *jump* with one of his books.

JULIA: *And it went from approximately how much to how much in what course of time?*

TERRY: Well, the reason why it jumped so much was probably because it wasn't sold really, it was given to the good reader, you know.

JULIA: *Subscribers?*

TERRY: Yeah, things like that. The story was called THE EYES OF THE CAT (written by **Alexandra Jodorowsky**, cult director of EL TOPO), and he made it especially for that, and it was a very beautiful little book where the pages were yellow and the drawing was wonderful. So you could get it for perhaps $25.00 when you could find it, buy it, and it was very difficult to find at first; and then it jump to 4,000 franc, which is something like around $120 or something, and that is in the span of two or three years. That's a very big jump. So everybody went into that market. It's very helpful for the editor to publish those books, because they don't cost very much and in general they reprint bigger the same story that they do in the normal format. They print it *bigger* in black and white with a special cover or something, a cover with a tissue on it and things like that, and then they sell it for five times the price of the normal edition.

JULIA: *And the collectors all go for it.*

TERRY: Yeah.

JULIA: *Has THE EYES OF THE CAT been reprinted like that?*

TERRY: Not like that, no. It has been reprinted, but the little book in itself is an object, you know.

DAK: *Well, you had said that comic books here were not as popular as they were a few years ago, but still more popular than they were ten years ago —*

TERRY: Yeah, a lot.

DAK: *Would you say what happened in France recently, the sort of shake out in the comic-book industry, also happened here?*

TERRY: I think it was because of the saturation, you know. Just that, because it was *so* successful it was too easy for a young guy with no real ability to find a place to put his own story with his own name as an author, to do the thing in a very amateurish way. Lots and lots of books that are very amateurish, very *luxurious* looking but the content is very amateurish, so it's a normal shake up because the public couldn't take that much. But I think that the public wants *more* of the good things, still *wants* more! A lot of book shops around here, people are there every day to see what's new, and they want to buy but if they don't find the good quality then they don't. But they would like to, but for the money they don't buy amateur.

DAK: *Is there no cheap edition, like the comic books of the United States?*

TERRY: No, not in mainstream. There is what would be called "station literature," you know — the little books softcover you buy in the station for . . .

JULIA: *To read on the train.*

TERRY: Yeah, to read on the train, on the bus, and the schoolboys buy them. They are very cheap, they are like comic books, and most of them are American comic books translated; but it's a com-

19th century tradition, caricature."

pletely different world. You were speaking about Editions Lug, the reprints of BATMAN and SUPERMAN and things like that, they are a completely different world, even a different system for distribution.

DAK: *Do you think some of those schoolboys grow up from that to read the other comic books?*

TERRY: I don't know. I think those schoolboys are more interested in television than... Actually, yes. One of the biggest things is the age of the comic readership here is very astonishing for an American to see. The...

JULIA: *The middle?*

TERRY: Yeah, the middle age is between 25 and 35 years, and it's more like up to 45 now.

JULIA: *So you think that the readers are the same readers, even though they're getting older they are staying with the same things?*

TERRY: Yeah.

JULIA: *But there's not a lot of young people being brought in?*

TERRY: *(Pause.)* I think it's more a cultural thing. You read a lot of comics if you are an artist or a musician or if you like music. You would read comics like you would listen to sophisticated music — not like you would listen to **Michael Jackson,** that's *too* popular. You understand what I mean? It's an intellectual thing to read comics.

JULIA: *It's very similar in Japan but it spans across all age groups. Businessmen in their 40s and 50s will read them on the train.*

TERRY: Yeah.

DAK: *Or so we hear, anyway.*

TERRY: It's less popular than in Japan in the way it's much more costly. In Japan it doesn't cost very much, you get 300 pages for nothing. *(Disturbance at adjoining table.)* So it has been an intellectual thing, comics.

DAK: *Was this so when you were a child?*

TERRY: No, not at all. When I was a child it was very much part of the culture, but the culture of the kids. So what happened really is that in 1968 came a *big* change in politics and in mentality. A group of French artists who were working with PILOTE, in which **Jean (Moebius) Giraud** was working doing his Western BLUEBERRY, around 1968 they start growing with the public, what was their public, which was around 18 —

JULIA: *The Baby Boom.*

TERRY: Yes, it was the Baby Boom, and they start making the stories much more mature. Every year the magazine would gain in maturity, so in 1968 and 1969 they started doing things about politics, about way of life, things like that. And the stories were more like the movies, more like American movies with strong characters and drama. And the public grew *with* the medium, and the medium grew with its main public. So it's still the same public, and the people who came after, the little brothers, the little sisters, who read comics now, still buy comics — but in book form, there's more money they can afford.

DAK: *This is exactly what has been going on in the U.S., the graphic novel has grown popular because the readership has grown older and is therefore able to afford that format. Did you get the early Marvel comics by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby here?*

TERRY: Yeah, it wasn't very big. It wasn't something that related in a big way to the comics in Europe. To understand the comics in Europe . . . you know that with the movie the French critics discovered most of the *great* names in popular movies, like **Alfred Hitchcock** and **Arthur Penn** and other big movie

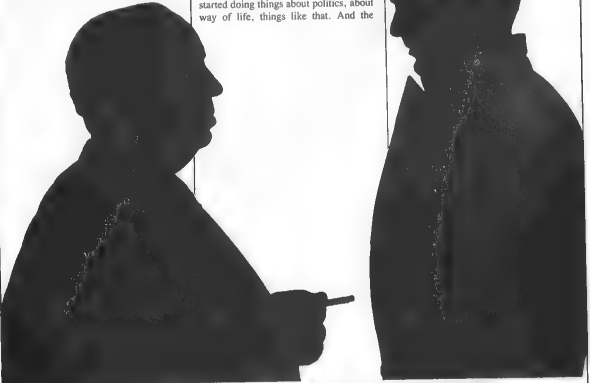


Photo Alfred J. Hitchcock

Alfred Hitchcock and Cary Grant (circa 1955).

"The Smurfs were just side char-

directors. I could give plenty of names but **Hitchcock** is the main one that French critics discovered in 1955 and wrote about and made a lot about a popular form of entertainment. That's a thing that happens all of the time between France and the U.S.; you have artists that are considered in the United States as *popular* entertainers and not serious people on whom you could write about, yes.

DAK: *Yes. I must say that the French are suspect though because, after all, they have a great fondness for Jerry Lewis.*

TERRY: Yes?

DAK: *To my mind that makes the entire thing suspect.*

TERRY: Yeah, well that's a *very* good example. Yes, in France **Jerry Lewis** is considered the big artist. You apparently don't understand why — I don't understand why either!

DAK: *Jim Salicrup's theory is that he makes Americans* appear *as stupid as the French have always thought they were. (Laughter.)*

TERRY: Yeah, but you can't say that of **Hitchcock** or of **Woody Allen.** The French have taken **Woody Allen** seriously before they did in America, for example. The French intellectual — the same for the **Belgian** — has got a very great respect for the popular artform, and is ready to write about the popular artform and be very literate about it. So what happened with the comics is that in the '60s they start to write about comics; they start to write books and articles, big, like would be in TIME MAGAZINE, the equivalent of making the cover.

JULIA: *Whereas the Americans and the British felt that comics were just an everyday sort of thing, the French and so on made them into a very intellectual subject to be discussed in a serious form.*

TERRY: Yeah, so it's perfectly legitimate to be interested in that kind of thing, so in the book stores they have comics on the bookshelf mixed with —

JULIA: *WAR AND PEACE.*

TERRY: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *That type of change you discussed, with people growing up and continuing to read comic books — and having heard what Kojima and Koike said about Japan — it's striking the similarities in the way that the comics market was not really for adults, and in all of these different areas it's kind of advanced. It seems to me as if what's going on in the United States is mirroring these things.*

TERRY: Yeah.

DAK: *We're probably on the cusp of what's already transpired here and in Japan, just in the early stages. So that brings me to the question, because talking to you may be a crystal ball for us: What do you think is the future of comic books in Belgium?*

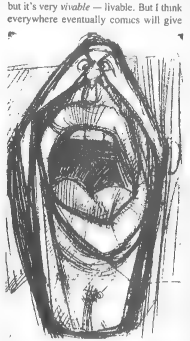
TERRY: I think it's going to go on being big for at least 20 years. Perhaps it is not going to grow much more than that, but it's very *viable* — livable. But I think everywhere eventually comics will give way to other mediums, image mediums, like computer games. I see a normal progression from comics to a computer world, you know, where the reader can be the actor or the artist. I think the computer gives possibilities to the reader to be an artist and to give life to its own world. I think in the future everywhere — in America, in Japan, in Europe — it's going to be the same

JULIA: *We read a very interesting interview —*

DAK: *I was just thinking of that.* (Laughter.) *Do you get ROLLING STONE magazine here?*

TERRY: Yes, but then I don't buy it every time.

DAK: *They just had their 20th anniversary issue; it's basically ROLLING STONE doing their best imitation of COMICS INTERVIEW, with interviews of people in all walks of popular culture — and what Julia was thinking of is their interview with Timothy Leary. What he said was startlingly close to what you were just saying. He said basically he's always been right where his generation was — he was in the War when his generation was in the War, he went to school when his generation went to school, he was a teacher when his generation got serious and got jobs, and when the '60s came about he was in the forefront with LSD and so on — and now in the '80s he's gone into computers. He talks about software that he is affiliated with the development of, says that there will be software that will allow you to*



© 1974-89 Jean Mulatier

TERRY: "In France Jerry Lewis is considered the big artist. You apparently don't understand why —

acters appearing in comics by Peyo."

make a melange, allow you to combine any number of images and so on — so that, for example, instead of television being a passive medium it would be a creative medium where you could plug into it and change it around. The whole thing is very fascinating.

TERRY: Yeah, I always felt that the pleasure of reading comics or listening to music is *ensemble* — is part of the pleasure of the artist, an excerpt of the pleasure of the artist. So the normal evolution of any art, with the new techniques coming, is that the pleasure of the consumer will go nearer and nearer and nearer the pleasure of the artist, of the creative artist. *I believe* in that. I believe that the reader in 25 years will have the same pleasure as the comic-strip artist without having to draw all of the little details himself, with the machine doing the hard work and he exploring his own imaginary worlds and all of the possibilities of his imagination.

DAK: *Leary says that until hydraulic technology was created, man was unable to understand himself and how his own blood system and so on worked, and once the technology of hydraulics came about it enabled man to understand how the circulatory system works; and similarly that until computers came about, the external technology, we were really incapable of understanding the workings of our own minds. He said that the attempts that were made with LSD were lacking a language, a way to understand the mind, but we're now at the point where because of computers we can begin to understand our own minds.*

JULIA: *And therefore also expand computers way beyond what they are now.*

TERRY: I think that humanity always considered that the mind was working as the most complicated machine in any one time period, you know. The mind was working like telephone switching in the 1930s because the most complex machine was the phone system.

DAK: *It became the metaphor.*

TERRY: Yeah. So the most complex machine gives a look into the mind. But I think we're coming now to the point where the mind itself and what we know about it through biology and gene splitting and neurophysiology and things like that, the mind is coming to be its own metaphor. *(Laughter.)* It's being considered now as the most complex machine and the computer more likely to evolve in the image of the mind, not the mind to evolve to the metaphor of the computer.

DAK: *Right, right.*

TERRY: It's happening now with parallel computing and holograms and analogical computing and things like that.

DAK: *And that's the future of comics, folks.* (Laughter.)

TERRY: Probably internationally.

DAK: *Or interplanetarily.* (Laughter.) *Until we bump up against something that has a whole different system from ours, and then we'll be puzzled all over again.*

TERRY: Comics was invented at the same time as photography and movies, around the same time, and when you look at **Winsor McCay**, in 1896 he saw his first movie projection — he was there at the very *beginning* of the movie medium — and he started doing comics two years after I think, doing sequential stories two

— I don't understand why either!" Illustrations by MULATIER.

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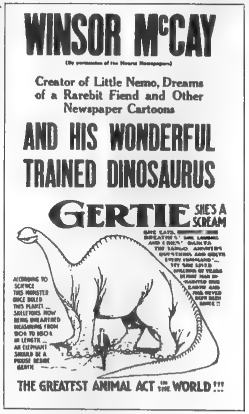
years after looking at film.

DAK: *What I think is not really perceived... you know, you have a tendency to accept the world however you find it. Television was there when I was born, I didn't think much about it. But it comes back. When you mention the start of comics and motion pictures and photography and so on, all basically 100 years ago, that brings to mind a friend who I admire and respect a lot, the late E. Hoffmann Price. He was born in 1898, he was in the First World War, in the Cavalry, he was on the Olympic fencing teams and so on, and when you consider what he saw in his lifetime, the enormous changes from the crossover from the horse and buggy era! Julia and I were looking at a HARPER'S MAGAZINE from 1896 that had advertisements for the new cars, and this was before they had evolved to look different from carriages, it was truly a horseless carriage! You look at it and realize they hadn't come up with a form yet, they had just unhitched the horse. When you consider where we are, regarding what we've seen with computers and space and so on, and then consider what we may see, I am continually surprised by how quickly things happen. Some of the things we're talking about sound outlandish, but we may be sitting here a year or two from now taking for granted the software that we're discussing.*

TERRY: Absolutely, yes, yes. But I think comics were advanced in that sort of peculiar direction; in fact I think that **Winsor McCay** anticipated by 100 years lots of things that are happening now! When he drew LITTLE NEMO he had that *perfection*, the perspective, you know. He had an imaginary world that produced that perfection to its best, that perfection now in the hands of everybody through 3-D modeling with the computer. When you look at the first production that was . . . I don't know was it 3-D modeling, animation? — you see it's very near to what **Winsor McCay** did 100 years ago. You look at THE SINKING OF THE LUSITANIA he did in 1917 — an animated movie — you look at his way of making the sea move, it really *looks* like their experimentation they do now to make

"There's no reason a Picasso should sell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Creator of Little Nemo, Dreams of a Rarebit Fiend and Other Newspaper Cartoons
AND HIS WONDERFUL TRAINED DINOSAURUS
GERTIE SHE'S A SCREAM
ACCORDING TO SCIENCE THIS MONSTER ONCE ROAMED THIS PLANET. SAUSTORUS. NOW BEING GUARANTEED ROARING FROM 90 TO 100 ft IN LENGTH ... AN ELEPHANT SHOULD BE A PUSSY BESIDE HER!!!
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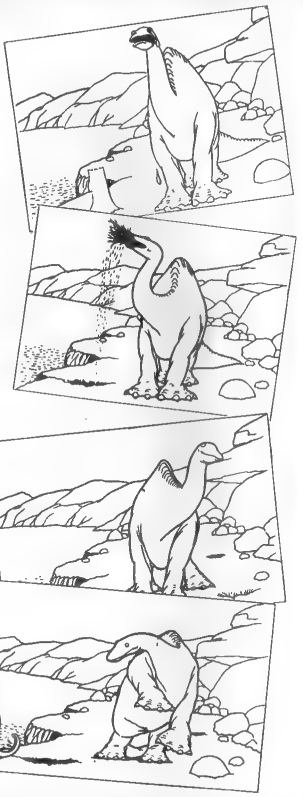

the sea move through synthesized images. They try to get the sea movements and things like that, a house that flies — things that **McCay** did in 1910 or 1912. He had *that* perfection! He had learned as an artist that kind of perfection that machines give you now, the same imaginary world people are doing now.

I think that comics anticipate a *lot* of what the computer is enabling everybody to do. If comics as a medium is bound to be old fashioned in 25 years time, we will see that the spirit of comics, of making little characters that move and speak and do action and live in an imaginary world with its own rules and who take things from the world, the objects of everyday life, and make those objects seem wonderful and *magic* — all that kind of spirit in comics will *grow* in tremendous ways in the future age of the computer. Comics will be understood in a very profound way in the next century.

DAK: *Well, situated where you are, in Europe, you are — I don't want to speak for you — but maybe ideologically . . . the Soviet Union and the communist countries are much closer to you, but also you get a certain amount of influence from the*

The newspaper "ad" and a few frame blow-ups from Winsor McCay's GERTIE THE DINOSAUR.

for millions while Winsor McCay —"

United States.

TERRY: Yes.

DAK: *What can you tell us about comics, if indeed there are any, in the Soviet Union or so on? Does any of that ever come through?*

TERRY: Not very much. Some artists come from — some of the *best* artists now — come from the East. **Enki Bilal** is coming from the East and is one of the biggest names in comic books today.

JULIA: *He's from the Soviet Union?*

TERRY: I don't know. East Germany or Czechoslovakia, I am not sure. And **Andreas** is coming from somewhere around there, too. So there are people coming from those countries. But the stories themselves don't come through!

DAK: *Do you know, are there comic books in the Soviet Union?*

TERRY: Not really, no. I know in Yugoslavia they have.

DAK: *So there's not a lot of influence coming from the East. I wonder how much is going in?*

TERRY: I don't know, not much. I think that except for the biggest ones like TINTIN or ASTERIX, maybe nothing.

(Waiter ignores Julia trying to order the famous coffee ice cream.)

JULIA: *Waiter blindness strikes again* (Laughter.)

DAK: *Nora Maclin – when I was at Marvel years ago she was the production person who laid out and designed a lot of the text pages – she was from behind the Iron Curtain, had grown up there, had worked on SOVIET LIFE magazine, and she and her husband had moved and she ended up working at Marvel Comics'— from one iron curtain to another...* (Laughter.) *I trusted what she said because she was from there, whereas you're never sure that what you see on the news or in the newspapers is really the way things are. Some of the stories she told were frightening! We used to have office parties at Marvel, for instance, and it amazed her that we did not have to inform the police first. She said whenever they had more than six people assembled they would have to inform the police and they would send over one person for each five or six. This was normal in her life. I keep seeing in the papers that there's this "Westernization" going on, but I suspect much of that is wishful thinking on the part of the news media. But I guess what I'm wondering is whether any comic books get in there, because once they have rock & roll and comic books they might as well hang it up, it's all downhill from there.* (Laughter.)

TERRY: Rock & roll more than comic books, I think. But in fact Belgian and French comic books — let's call them that, but it's not comic books — they are exporting to Germany very well, to Italy, to Spain, to Holland, to Scandinavian countries, even to Greece I think, and they are very well known in Morocco and things like that also.

(Desserts ordered.)

DAK: *Are there individual editions in each of those countries with translations?*

TERRY: In some cases. And the artists which are of international stature, they come from Holland to France to publish their main books, you know — they don't come from Italy — because this is the center, for the moment. With Spain and Italy they have their own centers and doing their own thing and pretty well. It's different, the market there is different. They don't publish books in Italy, they publish magazines and things that are more like comic books

DAK: *What we would think of as comic books.*

TERRY: Yeah.

DAK: *As there is TINTIN, is there a popular Italian comic?*

TERRY: I'm not sure, but the popularity is not comparable in the numbers. I think that CORTO MALTESE by **Hugo Pratt** is probably the widest known name in Italy in the comics. It's a *big* hero here, everybody likes CORTO MALTESE.

Hugo Pratt's CORTO MALTESE. Probably the widest known name in Italy in comics — everybody likes Corto.

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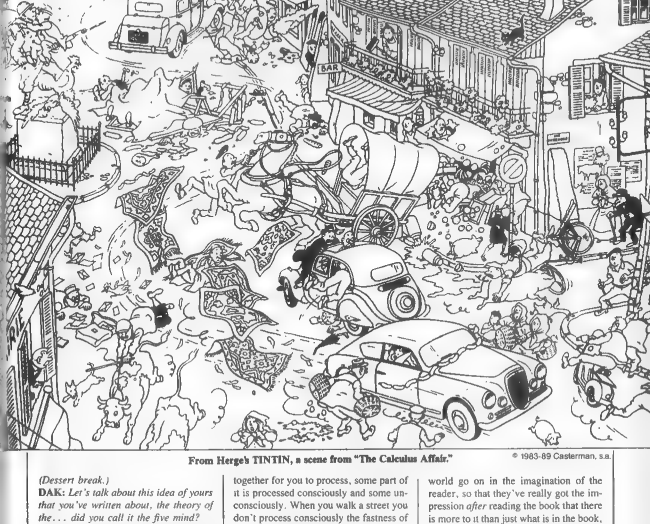
"Hugo Pratt is probably the widest known name in Italy in comics."



From Herge's TINTIN, a scene from "The Calculus Affair." © 1983-89 Casterman, s.a.

(Dessert break.)

DAK: *Let's talk about this idea of yours that you've written about, the theory of the . . . did you call it the five mind?*

TERRY: Yeah. You could call it stereo-realism. It's the idea that in the brain you have receptors, you have different centers for treatment of information specific to the task, like in the computer you have the mathematical . . .

DAK: *Coprocessor.*

TERRY: Yeah. There's a psychologist called **Olaf Gaffner** who wrote a book called CHAMBERS OF MIND in which he speaks about those different centers in the brain. They are the center for mechanical thinking, center for kinesthetic thinking — like body movements and things like that — a center for space and visual thinking, a center for musical thinking, a center for verbal thinking, and a center for interpersonal thinking. And I think that *all* fiction plays on those centers to try to impose some kind of realism to the reader. When you walk in the town you get all kinds of information coming together for you to process, some part of it is processed consciously and some unconsciously. When you walk a street you don't process consciously the fastness of a car but something in your brain makes the calculation that you can walk into the road, you don't have to write formulas about it. So the reality, the *true* reality, is one of the main faculties, you always get information on those levels. And we are conscious mostly of the verbal, of verbal subroutine, that explains most of the things that we need to live consciously. So mostly we work on the verbal subroutine to manage with the world.

But I think that when you want to write a fiction, when you want to make the world that you write about or draw real to the reader, you've *got to* activate the other centers, especially when you look at the drawing the visual and spatial center is activated. When you are looking at superheroes struggling the kinesthetic center has activated. But I think for a story to really give the impression that the world in which it happens exists and to make that world go on in the imagination of the reader, so that they've really got the impression *after* reading the book that there is more to it than just what is in the book, that it continues in his brain to exist — you must have had this impression when you read a book like DUNE or something like that, you close it after the first reading and then it goes on working in your brain —

JULIA: *And when you read the book the second time around you'll pick things up that you didn't get the first time around.*

TERRY: Yeah.

JULIA: *But you really did.*

TERRY: Yeah, your unconscious is processing them. Also you — I had that impression for a long time reading science fiction and things like that — but when you close a book the world, not *just* the plot but the *world*, the setting, is going on working in your imagination. The DUNE I have in mind now is not the same I had in mind when I read it the first time. I've not reread it but I *know* that the DUNE I've got in my mind is in the act of growing in me. Why? Because DUNE is one

"Belgian comics, European comics, come from the 19th century

of those books that plays on all of the centers of the brain and gives us stereo-realism. That really keeps you working, because you can't go to the end of the story that plays on all of the centers together — and that plays the centers to what they do best! So for example I will say that the superhero, main genre in the comic books in America, is mainly playing on the kinesthetic and mechanical centers. And the great thing about what **Frank Miller** and **Alan Moore** are doing now, they are trying to integrate that with the interpersonal center. So they try to do a thing on three centers, not on two centers, to give the stereo much more of the realism.

DAK: *What centers would you say Belgian comics work on?*

TERRY: Belgian comics, European comics, come from the 19th century tradition — that America knew very well also — which is the caricature, and *that's* interpersonal because it's the reading of the face, the face movement. So that goes to the interpersonal center of the brain; it's *probably* a kind of interface between the understanding of the word and the reading of the face, what happens between those two kinds of information. Good comics play on the collage, the distance between the two sorts of information. When you read **Charles Schulz** or **Winsor McCay**, for example, it's very definite, they play on the words on a certain level. For example when you read **McCay**'s dialogues, he has a very good ear for a kind of normal conversation that happens in the house or on the subway or on the street, and a very cool and very . . . not anguished?

JULIA: *Calm.*

TERRY: Yeah, very calm. And then you look at his image and *incredible* things happen into his images. In fact he gives many levels that you can't easily put together to understand perfectly everything. He plays on various levels and lets them do their thing at their best and then puts that together; and the reader integrates all of this and makes a world out of it, and you can't say that the world the reader gets from reading is the same as the world that another reader would get from the same material.

JULIA: *Because it's the reader's imagination coming into play.*

TERRY: Yeah, yeah But if you look at **Milton Caniff**, for example, there are images where it's *clear* that those images are playing on the kinesthetic brain of the reader. He plays on gesture, you know. Like, you can understand why those gestures appear in the story, because the story produced them, but when you take the image by itself you see that there is a kind of visual thinking in those gestures that's completely independent from the plot, but which activates a center while reading the plot.

DAK: *And you try to do this with your own material?*

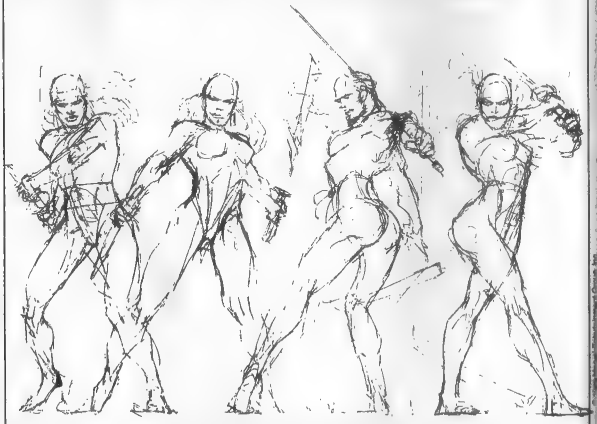
TERRY: Yeah

DAK: *How do you do that when you work with the artist — try to play on all of those levels? How do you actually accomplish that?*

TERRY: Well, I try to invent situations where you will have the kinesthetic and a feeling for . . . Well, I must go back a little. I think there are more centers — for my theory, anyway. I don't want to push the theory as a psychology theory or a scientific theory, it's not that. It's just a useful tool to direct my attention when I write. But I think a very important thing also is the center for animal feeling.

JULIA: *Instinct?*

TERRY: Instinct, yeah, yeah — instinct



Frank Miller's ELEKTRA . . . a sample of the pencils and (on the next page) the finished piece — all by Miller.

© 1986 Frank Miller/Reprinted by permission

tradition — that America knew very well also — the caricature."

for the movement of animals. When you look at little kids the way they look at dogs and cats and things like that, it's true that it's an ancient thing that comes from the period of being a hunter, you know, in the past long ago, but it's *still* there when you are young. When you are young you have that empathy for the animal, and it's very present in comics, it's everywhere in comics. Animals, **Walt Disney** and all of those things, are playing on that empathy, on that center. So that's one of the centers that I wanted to mention, that's part of the whole set.

When I am writing stories I am trying to find situations that are very topical, very specific. I don't write plots that need a lot of explaining of what went before and what is going on parallel — I just want the story to happen on the page. Everything that the reader wants to know, happens *on* the page, because that page is a world in itself. And the reader must get ahold of the element on the visual scene. You can't have a plot where the important things are said. The important thing must be shown all of the time. So I invent situations where mechanical ideas . . . even numbers, you know, the play on the numbers. In one of

"BUT THE OTHER GOLD IN MY POKE HAD BEEN STOLEN! I MADE HER GIVE ME AN I.O.U. FOR IT!"
ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS, MAM, AT COMPOUND INTEREST, OR I TEAR THIS DIVE APART SPLINTER BY SPLINTER!
© 1957-89 Walt Disney

Walt Disney (and company) play on our empathy (for animals).

the stories I am doing now it's about exchange, how you exchange things for other things, you know. In a primitive society you exchange one thing for the other, and one of the main things in the plot is "What do they exchange for what?" I think that the idea, the concept of exchange, is a concept that will *activate* the center of evaluation of the value of things, in the brain of the reader. I mean mathematics can go into it. And I try to have a situation where *lots* of those things are happening. So the plot is not only between people, objects and animals and physical events and things like that are happening.

I think that all of the great storytellers have always had a knack of doing exactly that, without the theory. They don't need a theory. I need a theory because I am a

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"I work with a big merchandising society who does the work for

Model sheet from one of Tex Avery's many (17 in all) DROOPY cartoons (1949).

theorist. *(Laughter.)* But they do exactly that, without having the theory, so my story won't look very different from others. I think **Alan Moore,** for example, in WATCHMEN, I could show you where the theory perfectly fits the material; but we would have to be looking at WATCHMEN. **Chaykin,** when he does TIME[2] he's playing on the auditve center with all of these sound effects. He's playing on the visual equivalent of sound, but of course it's processed by the sound processor in your brain, and the visual as well. **Chaykin** I think is probably the one who has pushed the thing the furthest, and perhaps his stories are not clear enough for people to understand what he is doing. But I think what he does is really breaking . . . *(Gestures with open hand.)*

JULIA: *Breaking new ground.*

TERRY: Yeah, new ground.

DAK: *Well, we know you are a writer, are you also an artist?*

TERRY: No, I don't draw at all. But I'm working in different fields like writing the stories, writing the theoretical articles about comics, and also I work with a big merchandising society who does the work for **Walt Disney**, Lego, **Tex Avery** and **Warner Brothers** material and things like that, in France. I work for them on different projects. For them recently I wrote an interactive book for Asterix, you know.

DAK: *I've written interactive books.*

TERRY: So I wrote a book in the universe of Asterix for them. Generally, it's very punctual and quick work. I go there for a few hours and work a concept or something, and then I forget it because they do the finishing of the thing. I'm just there for concept making. But I use the *same* theory all of the time. When they ask me if I have an idea for books for children, and they give me an example of the artwork or the object the book will be — like the German books where you have a hole and you must invent images that go around that hole, I don't know if you know this.

JULIA: *No.*

TERRY: It's a kind of gadget book where you have this hole and you have to invent the idea that will use that hole, in the subject matter of the book. I use all of the time that theory about trying to get more than one level in the story. All of the time I'm doing that.

DAK: *And so you work in merchandising, not just material from Belgium but also material coming in from outside?*

TERRY: Yeah Generally, it's things that I even don't see perhaps until one or two years after, you know, so it's easily forgotten because it's a few hours work concept making and then they go to someone else. *(Coffee break.)*

DAK: *Well, I think no visit to Belgium would be complete without a mention of the Smurfs, since Peyo is from here. Bear in mind, the readers may want to drop nuclear bombs on Belgium when they find out that's where the Smurfs come from!* (Laughter.) *But, what is Peyo's stature here, and what can you tell us about the Smurfs?*

TERRY: Oh, it's complex, it's multileveled. For the kids it's just like for the American kids, just something that goes on on the telly and they know at first sight what it is. For older generations the Smurfs were just side characters appearing in comics by **Peyo.** He wrote a story that went to the Middle Ages and chivalry and things like that where he invented those little blue characters. They were just part of a story by him. And then obviously the public liked the characters and asked for more, so he made it a series apart. The books by **Peyo** are rather pleasing and nice to read. I think it's a good resume of what a little universe should be. Neat, you know, you've got everything in that little universe. But also it has been — I'm not

Walt Disney, Lego, Tex Avery and Warner Brothers — in France."

sure — but I think it's the model now for every other universe of the same kind. If they want to invent characters now, they invent a whole set of the same characters with a little peculiarity;there will be the same big chief and the same 100 or so different type people together there. So now it's a model, a matrix.

DAK: *Is Peyo still producing new material?*

TERRY: I'm not sure if he's writing anything new. In fact I think the irony of it is probably that his comics were the best things he did and they are probably the things that sell the least of all of the Smurf things.

JULIA: *Were the Smurfs ever really big in Belgium?*

TERRY: In the '60s they were good merchandising, you found them on mustard glasses or on the milk bottles and things like that.

DAK: *And here you don't call them Smurfs, what do you call them?*

TERRY: Schtroumpfs.

DAK: *Does that have any meaning or is it just an invented word?*

TERRY: Yeah, invented. **Peyo** was part of a group of very active comic-strip artists during the '50s and '60s who reran the thing in parallel with the Tintin school. You've got the **Tintin** school and then you've got the **Franquin** school, like **SPIROU** — the school of **Herge** and the school of **Franquin. Peyo** was part of the school of **Franquin** — they were friends — writing and drawing stories with little characters with long noses, you know, like bigfeet characters of the '30s that you still find in the comic strips in America, sometimes. They were a very friendly lot, they discussed the stories while drinking beer and things like that. And one day one of the guys said, "Pass me the schtroumpf." — he was meaning the salt — and **Peyo** said, "Oh, that's a good name, the little people I am just drawing get that word." It is just a word they invented on the spot and decided to keep — it was not the result of a very extensive market survey. *(Laughter.)*

JULIA: *One thing I found interesting, you were saying there is now a gallery here in Brussels for original comic-book art, and they have exhibitions —*

TERRY: Yeah, in fact more than one gallery in Brussels.

JULIA: *In New York they have started to have auctions of comic art, and it hasn't really been highly recognized in the artistic community. What would single pages of Moebius fetch here?*

TERRY: $2,000. — $3,000.

DAK: *That's probably ten times what artwork gets in the U.S.*

TERRY: And when you go to a page by **Herge** it's unbelievable, it's a *lot* more! I watched a deal recently, two people exchanging a page of **Herge,** and they settled for a price of 220,000 Belgian francs, which is about $7,000.

DAK: *That might be comparable to Carl Barks material.*

TERRY: Yes. I think Americans are *crazy* about art. When you look at the original art by **Winsor McCay,** who I think is one of the greatest artists in the 20th century, the pages now are for that kind of price, $7,000 or something, and I think it's really ridiculous. I think it should sell very much higher than that. It's tremendous art and there's no reason why a **Picasso** or a mainstream artist should sell for millions of dollars while someone who was breaking ground as **Winsor McCay** did in his field — it's very important and should become more and more important! I think in the 21st century they will recognize comics as part of a new medium, as I told you, the computer

Another model sheet from Tex Avery & Co., from "Señor Droopy." Terry does merchandising on stuff like this (in France).

"To understand us is to look at the comics; they will see the world."

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Thimble Theatre
HEY RIGHT THERE! AN WHAT FOR ME OLDER PAL, I WAS GONNA TAKE THE BOAT AN GO TA THE PROSPECTORS. I GOT TO LEARN GOLD MININ'
MY GOSH! BULL MOLYTER THE OUTLAW IS LOOSE! HE'S COMIN IN HERE
THERE'S A THOUSAND DOLLAR REWARD ON HIM, BUT I AIN'T TRYIN TOM IS IT!
I'M STOPPIN HERE FOR AWHILE
AN IF YOU SKUNKS LOOKIN FOR TROUBLE IF AH AIN, WELL YOUSE GUNS AND LET'S GET THE WILLIN OVER WITH SHUFF!
I'LL TAKE ONE THING FOR YOU WIMPIES YUH GOT SLOSE ENUGHH TO MEOW WHEN TO BE PEACEABLE!)
HELLO. WHO'S BAT ARE YOU?
UGLY LOOKIN LITTLE MUTT AINT YUH!
HEH! HEH! HEH!
G-R-R
YOU'RE A ONERY LITTLE CUSS - BETTER NOT "G-W-R" AT ME
WELL, WELL! RUBBER EARS
KITCHY KOOO-
SWISH
WELL, LOOK ME DOWN
THINK HE'S LIVE, DOC
HE AINT AT THAT
HMM TOO MUCH SPINACH
C 23

E.C. Segar's THIMBLE THEATRE. And below/right: Peyo's SMURFS ("In the '60s they were good merchandising; you found them on mustard glasses or on milk bottles and things like that.")

medium that is to come, at the core —

JULIA: *In other words comics will become, as some of the old French artists that broke ground in their time, such as Manet and Monet, are now because of what they did for art, for the medium; that comics will a base of the future medium.*

TERRY: Yeah, absolutely.

JULIA: *Of computers.*

TERRY: Yeah, of interactive storytelling.

JULIA: *I think it's a good bet to collect them, then!*

TERRY: Yeah, absolutely[1] *(Laughter.)* You know, art is very hip now, because of the crash and the imminent crash people are buying art, but they are buying very high art. You could buy old comic art that is already classic, already written, you know: **Harold Foster** and **Alex Raymond** and **Milton Caniff** and **Winsor McCay** and **E.C. Segar** and all of those people that are part of the history of comics and part of the culture of the 20th century. It's a very reasonable bet to invest in that kind of thing.

DAK: *And you read it here in COMICS INTERVIEW!* (Laughter.)

TERRY: And also I think that comics, because of what I was telling about the different levels of interest in comics, the kinesthetic, the way the body moves, the way the face expresses, sentiment, all those *things* are in the comics, so it's a very, very precise subjective photography of our view of the world now. It's going to be very, very important for the historian in the 22nd century. To understand us is to look at the comics, because they will see the world — not like in the movies which are more like how a group of people see the world —

DAK: *A committee*

TERRY: Yeah, because they have someone to take the image and the other one to write the script and the other one do the sound and all, and there is a producer and all of those people, they are working on their vision together so it is a much more stereotyped vision of the world. But by just looking at the comics that **Herge** made or that **Milton Caniff** made, you can really go into their minds and really see the world through them, and perhaps see things that **Herge** or **Milton Caniff** didn't understand consciously. It's like the Egyptian tomb, the most interesting are the ones where all of the activities of the society are depicted. Well, it's the same with comics. All of the activities of the human are depicted in the comics, not only what happens but all that we can imagine, which is very good to show where our heads were at. *(Laughter.)*

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WRITER/ARTIST

"I work in a business in which most people spend

HOWARD CHAYKIN

Having absented himself from comics for two years, Howard Chaykin returned. This event was chronicled in COMICS INTERVIEW #3 where Mitch Cohn quizzed Howard about his then-upcoming series AMERICAN FLAGG! And now, sad to say, Howard is on the verge of leaving comics behind once more.

A lot of pulp has gone through the mill since 1983. AMERICAN FLAGG! hit the stands and became an instant sensation. It took the industry by storm, became First Comics' first really big hit, and made Howard a star. With and without Reuben Flagg, throughout the expansionist '80s, Chaykin continued to explore the mature spectrum of the medium, most notably in TIME², BLACKHAWK, and THE SHADOW. And in the last year his BLACK KISS has reverberated throughout fan and prodom alike, challenging everyone's preconceptions and expectations of comic books.

And he's not quite finished with us yet; there's more to come! So, let's catch up with the man who knew the job was dangerous when he took it . . .

JEFF GELB: *Howard, what's occupying*

their entire careers and lives having one idea."

most of your time right now?

HOWARD CHAYKIN: Right now I'm finishing a rewrite on a screenplay called SHOWDOWN for **Larry Gordon's** company at Fox.

JEFF: *Is this your idea?*

HOWARD: No, they gave us the assignment, and we're delivering it Friday.

JEFF: *Who is "we"?*

HOWARD: I have a writing partner, **John Moore,** who was my assistant on THE SHADOW and on TIME².

JEFF: *Writing assistant?*

HOWARD: No, an art assistant. I was at the San Diego Convention in '85 — I moved here in October of '85, and one of the reasons I was at the convention was to find an assistant. When I met John it was an extraordinary sympatico. He sent me a portfolio and — as I told him a year later — the portfolio was really a formality because he *had* the job. All I needed to know was that he could hold the pencil. *(Laughter.)* I mean, there are far more gifted guys that I wouldn't give a job on a bet, you know. John came on on the new FLAGG! crew as *colorist,* and ultimately became the writer with the second issue, after the writer we had hired delivered unacceptable work.

HUGH SURRATT: *Boy, and it didn't miss a beat.*

HOWARD: I really think John did a great job, I really do.

JEFF: *Did he realize that his future with you was going to be as a writer?*

HOWARD: By no means. We'd always talked, throwing concepts back and forth, and ultimately we ended up writing a screenplay together. And we've been hawking it around. I'm a corporation, he's an individual, but we are known together as Scathing Indictment Films, a division of Judeo-Christian Work Ethic Productions. *(Laughter.)* John's real young, he keeps *me* in tune with what's going on, but he's also got a real "old man" spirit, so *I* get to feel younger, too.

JEFF: *What kind of story?*

HOWARD: A romantic comedy, called THE TIME OF HER LIFE. It's about a guy who goes back in time to change history, and another guy follows and has to stop him. It's very sweet.

HUGH: *None of that sounds like you.*

Clockwise: Cody Starbuck, misc. pencils from Marvel, Black Kiss and American Flagg (plus a few "shots" of Howard).

All art accompanying this interview is ©1988 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc., unless otherwise noted.

"I do this for a job, I have no romantic illusions about comics."

Panels from Marvel's MAN-THING (FEAR #10), with Gray Morrow inking the pencils of Howard.

HOWARD: I hat's what everybody else says *(Laughter.)* Well, *that's* the whole point. You see, the problem is -- Jeff, as you know, you ask me one question and then you can leave the room -- *(Laughter.)* Since I work in a business in which most people spend their entire careers and lives having one idea, and one approach, it's a perfectly reasonable thing to presume that I am the same.

On the other hand, at 38 I'm still waiting for the *schmucks* that I work with to stop reading the same *drek* they've been reading since they were twelve, being *absolutely,* cosmically and carnally delighted by material that would *bore* any average adult! I have a fairly wide range of enthusiasms, since I have a life. I also recognize that I have a certain responsibility to comics and to various aspects of my profession. But *only* people in comics are *surprised* to discover that most of the material we're promoting are romantic comedies and comedy thrillers.

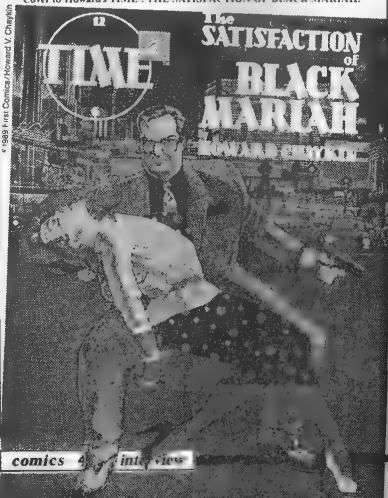
JEFF: *Well, why have you never tried to do any of that in comics?*

HOWARD: Do you honestly think there's room in comics — in an industry which takes as a given that a guy with a mask and underwear and a gun and who talks dirty is an adult comic book — has room for anything even *vaguely* smacking of a sophisticated romantic comedy?

HUGH: *Certainly not as far as the profit margin goes.*

HOWARD: I do this for a job, I have no romantic illusions about comics. The thing that I am *proudest* about my career in comics, is that I have managed to create a reasonably sized niche for myself *without* doing the accommodating stuff, and at the same time I haven't really had any profound appeal to the *other* avant-garde Jews.

Cover to Howard's TIME?: THE SATISFACTION OF BLACK MARIAH.



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"BLACK KISS is the most vilified comic in the country."

I'll use a phrase I've used before — it's Republicans, Democrats, and me. I feel sort of lost and alone in the desert.

JEFF: *I agree totally, yeah. But on the other hand — and I'm not trying to get down on you — but if it isn't the guys like you who drag comics kicking and screaming to the next level, will it ever happen?*

HOWARD: I don't think it ever *will* happen, no. I think —

JEFF: *Let me interrupt you for a second.*

HOWARD: Okay.

JEFF: *Which is unusual*

HOWARD: Oh, shut up! *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *But you say you have a certain responsibility to comics — how would you define that? I would define your responsibility to comics at this point to be dragging it kicking and screaming into something new.*

HOWARD: Well, I think I am, quite frankly. Here, consider this: One of the things that *astounds* me is it's 1989 now, FLAGG! debuted in June of '83, and since that time what *I've* brought to comics is spontaneous dialogue and a sense of *characterization* that is considerably *off* what had previously been dealt with in comic books.

I consider myself a middling draftsman, a very average artist — and this is neither false modesty nor false humility, neither of which I have in any particular great load. When I'm good at something, believe me, I acknowledge it. I'm not interested in passing off bad drawing as cartooning. I happen to feel that I do a workmanlike job, and I have to work really *hard* to get that workmanlike level of effect. I've never developed a tremendous technical facility. I spent the first half of my career damning technicrats. I'm spending the rest of it wishing I could have not damned them when I was able to learn the material. I have a profound empathy for a guy like *Gil Kane*, who is in a very similar state.

But it gets very frustrating being forced by circumstance to be quixotic when it is not in your nature, and it is *not* in *my* nature. I am a joiner, a herd person. I like being with people, both personally and professionally, literally and figuratively. It's very *frustrating* producing the material that I produce and having no fellow church members in the pew with me.

JEFF: *Why do you think that is?*

HOWARD: Because . . . well, let's ramble and find out. *(Laughter.)* A lot of it has to do with the fact that people who work in comics are people who grew up reading comics, it's a given. They don't come to comics from, "Well, I drove a cab for awhile, I think I'll try drawing comics."

JEFF: *Yeah, but you do, too.*

HOWARD: What's that?

JEFF: *You came to comics like everyone else.*

HOWARD: No question, I was *absorbed* by them. On the other hand, *perhaps* I was smarter than I thought and saw that comics, like television, was a constricting

Illustration of Howard's DOMINIC FORTUNE.

"I knew when I read WATCHMEN #10 I'd hate #11 and #12."

medium; that comics were the way they were *only* because that's the way they were. And . . . The fact is, I produce work that embarrasses and confuses a lot of my peers, because it's disrespectful, sensationalist, vulgar, and sordid. And it's all of those things because

JEFF: *I must have missed those books. (Laughter.)*

HUGH: *I would say disrespectful would be BLACKHAWK, and possibly even sordid, and vulgar of course. (Laughter.)*

HOWARD: The subtitle of TIME, which First didn't use, was SORDID TALES OF VULGAR ENLIGHTENMENT.

Consider how *frustrated* — you guys read comics and you know me, you know the material you've *got* to realize that with this plethora of articles in the mainstream press over the past year, I haven't had a nibble of acknowledgment. If I *thought* that I was as good as I'd like to think that I was, I could understand how **Charlie Parker** felt. On the other hand, that might make **Harvey Pekar** cringe. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Is it just the fact that we're working off a really incestuous talent pool?*

HOWARD: Well, BLACK KISS is the most vilified comic book in the country right now. It's outselling its nearest competitor three to one — and if they can find *anything* to jerk off to in *that* book, I'm astounded. *(Laughter.)* I did the book because I wanted to see if I could sustain my own interest and enthusiasm in a book about that sort of thing.

And also to get something out of my system. One of the single most *important* moments in my life in comic books was something that went by so fast I didn't even know it. It happened in '73 or '74 at DC Comics. I was schmoozing with **Alan Weiss, Mary Skrenes,** and another person. We were all talking, we had all only known each other for a year or so, we were just chatting, filling in the holes in our lives. The fourth person was a regular letter writer of comics who worked at DC and at Marvel for a couple of years and then sort of disappeared from the business. She occasionally

Panels from Chaykin's UPSTART THEATER presents SHAKESPEARE for AMERICANS.

MISTRESS KATHERINA...
THAT'S RIGHT, SLAVES. BEND OVER.
Italian stallions wanted.
Bitchy, dominant, stallionett into B & D, C.P., D.T., English, F, G.E., G.S., G.T., S & M T.T., V.A., seeks same
NAME'S PETE. I CAME ABOUT THE AD WHERE IS SHE?
THERE YOU GO
B&D
C/B
C/P
D/T
ENGLISH
F.F.
F/S
G.E
G/S
R/S
AND SCAT!
AH, THERE'S A WENCH. KISS ME, KATE!
Sincere attractive white couple, he 35 w.e she 30 is submissive seeks same Prefereabl in Padua.
You want B & D C/

"The *only* people *not* drag queens were the boss and me."

appears in letter columns. And after we talked there was this beat, and all of a sudden this other woman said, "Gee, I wish I had a past." It was an *astonishingly* embarrassing thing to hear. I don't think she was conscious of what she was laying on us, but I believe that she was speaking for an enormous part of the comic-book talent pool and audience. And I think that's a fairly salient point. There's a wonderful contradiction and you guys will know *exactly* what I'm talking about. Comic-book people want comics to be accepted as an artform, and they want to be taken seriously, but at the same time they realize that once that happens, it's not going to be the little club anymore. So, there's that wonderful bouncing dichotomy.

On *top* of which, you've got an audience of rapidly aging guys in comics. At the conventions there are fewer and fewer kids going on their own, there are more and more kids showing up with their parents, and those parents are the ones that are going to the conventions. I don't think this is going to lead to a renaissance of adult comics. Instead, it's going to lead to a lot of mainstream comic books with more guns and big breasts.

And if that's what's going to happen, then that's what's going to happen. I'm sorry, Gary, but that's life. Five or six months after BLACK KISS started appearing, I got a solicitation to work for a company, one of these new companies. This is the first thing to follow BLACK KISS. It's an "in" comic book about a bar in which people come in and tell their sexual stories or whatever work by guys who *clearly* have never had a date. **Eric Idle's** "Nudge nudge, wink wink, say no more," is far too real a living icon for comic books. I'm really tired of reading sex stuff by guys who have never had a date. I mean, it was bad enough reading mad scientists written by guys who never had gotten out of high school, but now that we're writing *sex* it's even worse!

JEFF: *And this is a book that you were solicited to* –

HOWARD: Yeah, and I Xeroxed the solicitation and sent it to everybody and said, "Do you believe this shit?" When **Fitzgerald** said the rich are different **Hemingway** said, "They have more money." It wasn't a facile banality, he meant that money served as an emotional buffer between reality and the rich. Comic-book people use comics *not* as literature, *not* as entertainment, but as a buffer. And as a training manual for social structure.

JEFF: *Won't some people, when they read some of your comments, say, "Wait a minute, he's forgetting at least two or three guys out there that are really —*

HOWARD: Of *course* I am. Who am I forgetting? *(Laughter.)* The only book that I read on a regular basis, with any *real* regularity, is YUMMY FUR.

JEFF: *I love that, too*

HOWARD: It's about subjects that interest me, sex, death and guilt

JEFF: *And boy, is it horrifying sometimes.*

HOWARD: Chester is obviously, whether consciously or unconsciously, a master of punch lines of incredibly filthy adolescent jokes, because all of his material is adolescent scat and sex humor translated into an adult realm.

JEFF: *Well, let's name some names here. What about Alan Moore, Frank Miller, the Hernandez Brothers, and Chester Brown? There must be a few others, who else am I missing?*

HOWARD: Well, Alan uses words better than anybody. On the other hand, I knew when I read the tenth issue of WATCHMEN that I was going to hate #11 and #12.

JEFF: *Why?*

HOWARD: Because I knew damn well he'd done *exactly* what he'd always done, which is not bother writing the ending before he started the book. What he did was . . . he rips off a second-rate episode of OUTER LIMITS. I was never a fan of THE OUTER LIMITS. I was a big fan of THE TWILIGHT ZONE because I was the right age —

HUGH: *THE OUTER LIMITS always seemed like —*

JEFF: *Monster of the week.*

HUGH: *Yeah.*

HOWARD: It just never interested me. I also never saw STAR TREK, because that came on when I started dating. I haven't reread WATCHMEN. One of the things that happened when I signed

Ad work for the promotion of Howard's AMERICAN FLAGG.

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"In the ratings situation I got real bored real fast."

on to do THE SHADOW was I saw the first issue of WATCHMEN in Xeroxes, so I was reading WATCHMEN *months* before anybody else was. Great stuff. V FOR VENDETTA is swell

JEFF: *But?*

HOWARD: No buts. He's swell.

JEFF: *Pushing the envelope a little bit?*

HOWARD: Yeah. He's a better writer than I'll ever be. I'm serious. He uses language extraordinarily well, there's a genuine poetry to his stuff

JEFF: *But what I'm saying is: Are other people addressing themes that can help to drag comics into a new realm, as well? Are there any great spots out there that maybe you want to point out that people don't know about? In fact, probably the best thing you can do is point people in the way of YUMMY FUR.*

HOWARD: Buy YUMMY FUR! Well, apparently Chester is the darling of the Harvey Awards this year. Bill Marks is upset. He's delighted that Chester is being honored, but he was sure that BLACK KISS was going to be nominated for *something!* I laughed and said, "Bill, grow up." *(Laughter.)* Nobody ever admits they like looking at fucking, because they think they're not supposed to like it.

HUGH: *Well, I've never known anybody like Dagmar (Laughter)*

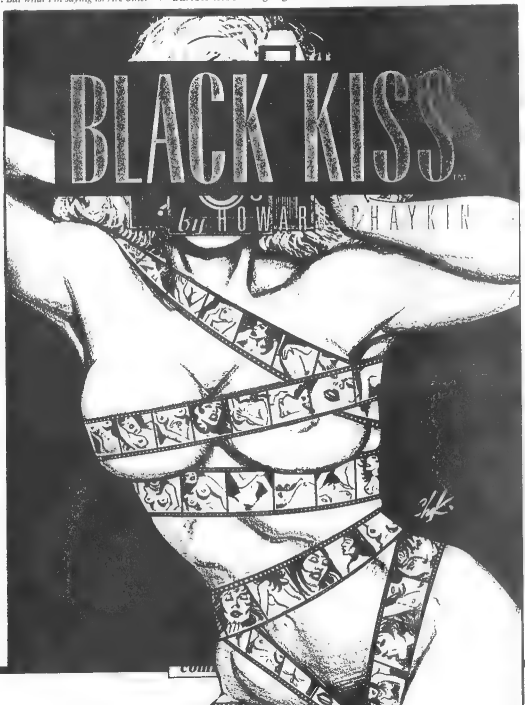
HOWARD: Yeah, really?

HUGH: *Really.*

HOWARD: I have

JEFF: *But you grew up in New York City*

HOWARD: The first job I had as an



"DC was convinced DARK KNIGHT was a dog."

artist was working in a studio called Zenith Press which made composites of fashion models, and the *only* people in the office who were *not* Puerto Rican drag queens were the boss and me — and both of us were humongously fat.

HUGH: *"Girls with dicks and boys with tits."*

HOWARD: Right

HUGH: *Good line.*

HOWARD: That made a *lot* of people *very* unhappy! *(Laughter.)*

HUGH: *I thought that was great.*

JEFF: *What do you really want to do with BLACK KISS? What is your goal with that book?*

HOWARD: To turn out twelve issues of an interesting, provocative read, and not much more than that.

JEFF: *What brought you to do that book in particular?*

HOWARD: Specifically?

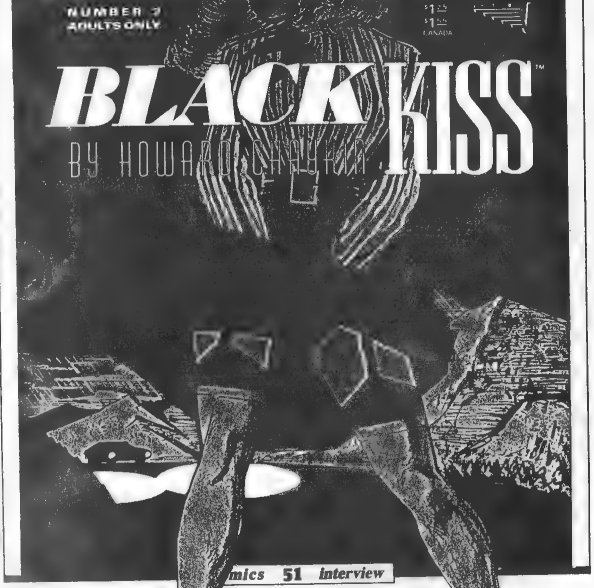
JEFF: *Yeah, and with Vortex. The history, Howard, give.*

HOWARD: Well — in the middle of the ratings situation I got real bored real fast

JEFF: *You mean the DC thing?*

HOWARD: Yeah I thought it was a lot of crap. I mean, bear in mind that DC is the company that was convinced DARK KNIGHT was a commercial *dog*, and was convinced that THE SHADOW was going to go right down the toilet. DC *continues* to shoot itself in the foot by *never* knowing when its output is any good. I mean, I had the first page of ARKHAM ASYLUM read to me on the phone yesterday, by a screenwriter friend of mind, and it was one of the funniest things I've ever heard, but not intentionally. I'm not talking about the script, I'm talking about the plot, the artist's direction — this guy is the most pretentious asshole I have ever read.

The bottom line is DC often doesn't know what it's doing. They've *always* behaved in that way, and I'm really bored. At the same time, I got really bored with the guys who were *against* the ratings system, because there was a level of self-righteous demagoguery that was a load of crap. The *only* one among them who had anything good to say was **Steven Grant.** Grant's letters to the



©1983 Vortex Comics, Howard V. Chaykin

"I do weird shit for the independents, I

BUYER'S GUIDE were consistently *reasoned* and well stated. Steve is a terrific journalist.

So, I was sitting and thinking, and I had had a concept for an erotic idea, the concept being identical twins, one dick between 'em. *(Laughter.)* It was originally called SMOKE DREAMS, because I didn't know what it was going to be about — I was looking for a genre. Should it be an erotic Western? Should it be a superhero story with a lot of fucking in it? And I decided to just do a roman noir, a contemporary noir — my first L.A. job, a story that took place in Los Angeles now, with a '70s sensibility. And that was that.

JEFF: *Why Vortex?*

HOWARD: I was in New York City in January of '87, at a disco called the Saint — which was gay *half* of the week, straight the *other* half — which apparently is a new thing in New York, I have no idea. They did a party to celebrate TIME², which was kind of fun. We all flew in, had a big party, it was a gas — but I was *pissed* because *my* name wasn't on the invitation.

I'm known in the business as the guy that First pays. Unfortunately, if they treat *me* the way they do, I've got to assume that they're treating some of the field hands out there, the real work-a-day guys, like *real* shit.

I was solicited to do a book at that party. **Lou Stathis,** who is an old friend from HEAVY METAL days, and a sympatico dude, a guy that I can get along with real easily, asked if I was interested in doing something.

JEFF: *He writes —*

HOWARD: He's the guy that writes the editorials, which are wonderful. He says, "How'd you like to do a book for Vortex?" We started fighting immediately. For some reason we didn't get along for that first six months — we talked about it for a *year* before we actually did it. And that's how it happened. I've been real happy working for Bill.

JEFF: *Was there ever a point at which you would have even approached Marvel or DC on it?*

HOWARD: *No!* Come on. Look, one of the things I've learned since FLAGG! is that I do weird shit for the independents. I do the straight stuff for Marvel and DC. TIME² originally started out as a very different project called POWER which I proposed to DC Comics. The negotiations just went on so long, and they kept throwing money at me!

I wouldn't have promoted AMERICAN FLAGG! to DC or Marvel, because at the time they wouldn't have had any idea what to do with it. After the fact, "Why didn't you come to us?" "For obvious reasons." BLACK KISS is not something *either* of those companies would have published under *any* circumstances, including Piranha or anything like that.

HUGH: *It would be tough running a subscription notice for that in the back of BATMAN. (Laughter.)*

HOWARD: Yeah. Well, look at it *this* way: The first review of BLACK KISS appeared in AMAZING HEROES following a review of PLASTIC MAN. *(Laughter.)* I thought that was swell. I consider myself a mainstream talent, the mainstream *doesn't*. The avant-garde guys consider me extremely mainstream because I choose to work in those themes. It's very *easy* to put me *out* of the mainstream, when mainstream talent turns its back in embarrassment.

The fact, as I was saying earlier, that in *all* of these articles about comics – I

Two-page spread from DC's SHADOW (all by Chaykin).

THE SHADOW is ® 1989 by the Conde Nast Publications, Inc.

do nickel and dime stuff for Marvel and DC."

wasn't even acknowledged. Now, in the comic-book world if I were to make a public statement along these lines, the first assumption on the part of the comic-book reader, "Whoa, kinda *bitter!* Maybe he didn't deserve to be." Okay, I can live with that.

By the same token, that **Larry King** piece, the TV piece following THE NEW YORK TIMES, I got five calls throughout the day to appear on the **King** show. Because in the comic-book industry there aren't a lot of articulate guys who are guaranteed to show up places wearing a necktie, a sport coat and a clean shave. Most comic-book guys either look like big, fat, stolid loaves of bread, or they look like guys that your parents were convinced were trying to steal the Dodge. And, as threatening as I can be, at least in a comic-book venue, I show up not looking corporate but pulled together. And I said, forget it. I didn't hear you acknowledge me — you're all embarrassed. Fine, defend yourself." So that's really that.

SO YOU HAVE TO TALK TO GO
A LITTLE DISCRETION...
NOW SOMEONE WHEN YOU'RE NOT SPEAK BUT LISTENING.
AGENCY TO SPEED TIME
BUT OUR MOLDER...
SO YOU'RE NOT A FAN OF THE BIBLE?
A BOOK OF LIES, FULL OF CONTRADICTIONS
A BOOK OF LIES, FULL OF CONTRADICTIONS
GOOD GOD, YOU'RE A JERK!
YEAH, I'M A JERK, BUT I'M NOT A LIAR
WHO'S THE BOSS AROUND HERE?
I'M BACK TO YOU, I'M NOT A SHEEP

JEFF: *Well, with all of that in mind, does comics still represent the place where you want to spend a significant amount of your time?*

HOWARD: Not at all. I saw the writing on the wall, after I left FLAGG! I mean, I'm *lucky* enough to sell a limited number of expensive books to a small audience. I don't reach a mass market audience. There are a half million people who buy all of the comic books in the United States, and maybe another half million people who know those people — and I don't think the BATMAN movie is going to do anything to comic books by *any* stretch of the imagination

JEFF: *I agree with you, although we might as well use this as a quick side note — did you see it?*

HOWARD: No.

JEFF: *Are you gonna?*

HOWARD: Yeah, sure. I was invited to three screenings and they were all postponed or moved or something, fine. I figure BATMAN will be around awhile.

JEFF: *That's for sure. In the best of all worlds would you want to stay in the medium, or are you tired of the medium?*

HOWARD: No, I *like* the medium, it's the *content* that bores me. I'm not interested at all.

HUGH: *What will you do, Howard, venture into movies?*

HOWARD: Hopefully. Bear in mind, if I fuck up in film, I'm going to come slinking back with my tail between my legs, sucking up to get work! *(Laughter.)*

HUGH: *Well, this movie thing, did this come along after you came to Hollywood —*

HOWARD: I moved out here to get into the movies, of course. I did *fine* in New York, I bought my apartment real cheap, which gave me instant equity. I gave myself three years. I got my first deal, so I'm here, I've done it.

I'm pitching like crazy. Unlike a lot of screenwriters, I don't have to take a nine to five job. I've got a job that keeps me writing. On the other hand, it's also time consuming. One of the reasons I stopped drawing is, in terms of time efficiency, I make more money as a writer.

JEFF: *Which do you like more? Never mind the money, do you enjoy being an artist more than you enjoy being a writer?*

HOWARD: It's my job. If I didn't have to live, I wouldn't do it.

JEFF: *Yeah, but you're such a good artist! To leave that kind of talent behind —*

HOWARD: Watch me do it again!

WATCHMEN

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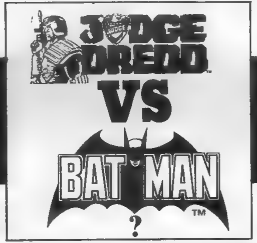

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"Hey, I'm no *schmuck!* I'm not hubristic, man."

WHEW!
CUMULUS!
SORRY, I'M LATE. POWERPONG, BUT I HAD TO SAVE CYNOBURB.
BLAST HIM.
BUT NOW, MADMAN, I'LL DEAL WITH YOU!
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From First Comics' WARP SPECIAL #1, with Chaos, Prince of Madness! Howard's pencils are inked/colored by George Freeman.

(Laughter.) Jeni buys a lottery ticket every Wednesday and Saturday just out of habit — if she wins, I'll see you later. I work to live. I'm not that *consumed* with this stuff. There are things I like to do. I suggested to DC a couple of years back to put me in charge of editing a line of *noir* paperback comics.

JEFF: *That's a great idea.*

HOWARD: They couldn't see it at all.

JEFF: *Why?*

HOWARD: I don't know. Look, they're not really interested in doing anything different or interesting. I'd *like* to stay in comics if I could assume that I could make the kind of money that I'm hoping to make. But I think the audience is going to pass and go on and be interested in something else.

Frankly, an audience that is interested in the kind of work that's *passing* for real tip top favorite right now, doesn't interest me as an audience. How seriously can I take an audience that thinks all that much of **Todd McFarlane?** The guy is a second-rate **Art Adams,** who in turn is a wonderful artist, but who is himself a second-rate **Michael Golden.**

JEFF: *For a guy who is about to jump ship, it sounds like you've still got a lot of oars in the water.*

HOWARD: Hey, I'm no *schmuck!* A lot of the guys in comics are looking at me wondering, "Hey, you're getting film work?" I'm not *getting* film work, I'm busting my ass every day hustling, calling, businessing. Nobody gave me work because I'm a hot shit comic-book talent.

JEFF: *Did that help?*

HOWARD: It got me in. It got me an agent. My agent is the woman who was representing the FLAGG! and GRIMJACK projects out here. But it didn't get me work. Nobody gave me work until they saw that I could deliver 120 pages of screenplay coherently.

JEFF: *Didn't they at least want to give you some storyboards?*

HOWARD: Oh, yeah, *lots* of that. They asked me to do the DICK TRACY adaptation. I said, "Sure, when Warren does the next DOBIE GILLIS revival." As it turns out, though, John will be writing the DICK TRACY stuff with **Kyle Baker.** I think **Kyle Baker** is the most important talent to come into the

"Being the best comic-book artist in the world

comic-book business since **Michael Golden.**

HUGH: *What the hell is Michael Golden doing now?*

HOWARD: Well, he's going to be doing BATMAN with me.

JEFF: *That's one of the projects we might as well talk about.*

HOWARD: Yeah, let's get to that. They've been asking me to do a BATMAN story. I explained that the problem for me was that BATMAN was about the poor needing someone to protect them from themselves, and in the real world Bruce Wayne is **Donald Trump. Andrew Helfer** starts giving me, "Come on, do it. If I get you a really good artist will you do it? Come on. How about **Michael Golden?**" So I said, "Sure, I'd *love* to. I had *no* ideas!

John comes over one day, with a great idea for a BATMAN story without Batman in it. It's a wonderful piece of business, a great piece. The two of us started jamming, doing the tiger in the cage ramble, and *ultimately* what we developed is a real exciting BATMAN story, five issues, and I can't tell you much about it. It's going to be fairly hard-boiled, fairly nasty, not in ways you would suspect. It's going to be about stuff that's been brewing in the City of Gotham for some 30 years. And no Joker.

JEFF: *Robin?*

HOWARD: By no means. There'll be lots of references in it to a number of BATMAN stories from the '50s.

JEFF: *Really?*

HOWARD: That's when I grew up reading BATMAN.

HUGH: *There'll be a big penny in the Batcave?*

HOWARD: Yeah, yeah. Did you ever read THE KRYPTONITE KID? It's a novel about a kid playing Superman with a towel around his neck. Well, my feeling is that *my* Batman is that kid grown up. He fell out the window and he didn't die. That's basically where we're going with it.

JEFF: *So, Golden has been recruited for that one?*

HOWARD: Michael and I have been talking. I've got to send Michael BLACK KISS. Michael is even less interested in contemporary comics than I am.

HUGH: *I think I just saw him do something for Continuity.*

HOWARD: What, BUCKY O'HARE?

HUGH: *Something. The last thing he did regularly was THE 'NAM, which was very good.*

Below: Gil Kane's original "breakdowns" for a SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN (#65). Next page: The finished panels by Chaykin.

is a lot like being the world's tallest midget."

HOWARD: I like Michael's stuff a lot. Michael wants to do an Art Deco BATMAN, and we've got a premise. I'm going to be sending him THE BLACK DAHLIA and THE BIG NOWHERE by **James Ellroy**, and a number of other novels, that's the tone I'm looking for. And it'll be a lot of fun. I want to make sure it's going to be packaged as a paperback.

JEFF: *When you say paperback, what do you mean?*

HOWARD: Ultimately have it as a trade paperback.

HUGH: *Once it's finished?*

HOWARD: Yeah.

HUGH: *What kind of schedule would it come out on?*

HOWARD: I'm going to be going to New York to work out a time frame.

HUGH: *So you would be looking at a monthly schedule?*

HOWARD: Right. I don't want any fill-in artists, I don't want any problems, I really want consistent continuity.

JEFF: *So, there is that one. What's some more stuff that you've got coming up?*

HOWARD: Let's see . . .

HUGH: *What about TOMMY TOMORROW, SPACE RANGER?*

HOWARD: Oh, *that* old thing! Actually, Space Ranger is the only character, along with Adam Strange, who is not in it.

JEFF: *With their history of revisionism and the revamping of character —*

HOWARD: I thought Alan did a great job with Adam Strange in SWAMP THING, that was probably my favorite sequence.

HUGH: *I could see you taking the planet Rann and its militaristic, almost fascist —*

HOWARD: *Almost?* I love this restraint. *(Laughter.)* Rann is **Burroughs'** Mars with tunics, you know. The reason I left Adam Strange out of the continuity was I felt that it should exist unto itself. I know **Richard Bruning** has been trying to get an ADAM STRANGE mini-series going since Hector was a pup, and I don't really care. I didn't want to step on anybody's toes. **Jan Strnad** asked me if he could use Space Ranger, and I said sure. What I did was I took Brent Wood, who had been Tommy Tomorrow's copilot in the old stories, and made him an important character.

JEFF: *How do you even remember this stuff?*

HOWARD: That stuff is really nutty shit.

HUGH: *Yeah*

HOWARD: It's the stuff I grew up reading, and I *really* love that stuff. I was a big fan of **Sid Greene's** when I was a kid. Very textural, very fussy.

HOURS LATER, AS NIGHT FALLS...
WE'LL STOP HERE, GIRL, AND SPEND THE NIGHT! YOU'RE NO DOUBT WEARY AND THE HORSE MUST EAT AND REST, OR ELSE DIE BENEATH US!
HERE YOU ARE, GIRL! SAMPLE ONE OF THESE PERSIMMONS!
THERE ARE MORE PITS IN THE DAMNED THINGS THAN CROM'S GOT THUNDERBOLTS, BUT--
ARE THOSE THE ONLY TWO PLEASURES BARBARIANS ARE WONT TO PARTAKE OF, THEN? FIGHTING AND EATING?

"Tommy Tomorrow starts out as the character that Peter

Above and next page: Chaykin's NICK FURY & WOLVERINE.

HUGH: Very *textural!*

HOWARD: And I just love the stuff. The outline for TWILIGHT . . . it started out as a fake letter, from one of the Star Rovers. The narrator of the thing is Homer Glint. The letter was all about what happened when immortality was injected into the human ecosystem and how it fucks everything up. I wish I had the letter to show you – it'll be part of the ad. Do you know who **Ned Buntline** is?

JEFF: *No.*

HOWARD: **Ned Buntline** I don't remember his real name is the guy who invented the American West. He was a reporter who went West looking for stories and started making stuff up because it wasn't interesting enough. He invented **Wild Bill Hickock, Buffalo Bill Cody,** *all* of those guys. He was the one who wrote the dime novels. Homer Glint is **Ned Buntline.** The tagline of the material is, "You read these stories as a boy, now you're ready for the truth!"

Glint is the guy who wrote all of those TOMMY TOMORROW stories, all of those STAR ROVERS stories, all of those PLANETEER stories, and this is what it's *really* all about. Tommy Tomorrow starts out as the character that **Peter O'Toole** played in THE RULING CLASS and becomes the Antichrist – literally. The narrator is Homer Glint from the Star Rovers, forming a trinity with the other two. Rick Purvis dies and becomes the Holy Ghost, and Karel Sorensen becomes God.

I'm having a *great* time with this. The artwork is coming in like I could never have imagined, it's far and away the *best* thing that **Garcia-Lopez** has ever done. I'm *flattered* by the work, quite frankly. The only character that I have created for the series is an ex-wife for Tommy Tomorrow, a fairly pivotal character named Brenda Tomorrow.

HUGH: *She was left at home a lot, huh.*

HOWARD: Well, as a matter of fact, that's what it boils down to. Trust me, it's great shit, I'm having a great time.

JEFF: *It strikes me, talking about all of these projects, that you're writing all of these things. Do you not wish to draw any of them?*

HOWARD: Artist shakes head no. *(Laughter.)* Not a chance, I don't

JEFF: *Why?*

HOWARD: Because it's an opportunity to work with artists who are so much *better* than I am, so fuck it

JEFF: *How do you feel when you open this stuff for the first time and look at the way that they've pictured something that*

O'Toole played in THE RULING CLASS — literally!"

you had in your head?

HOWARD: In this particular case, the only thing I have going for me is that I think I'm a better graphic designer. **Garcia-Lopez** can just draw rings around me, he is un-fucking-believable. **Gil Kane** came over to the studio, looked at these pages, and the first words out of his mouth were "That son of a bitch!" *(Laughter.)* He is that good. And look, working with **Michael Golden**, what a deal! How can you lose? With **Michael Mignola**, John and I are doing a new IRON WOLF book, a 100-page hardcover, and **Mignola** did as much work character designing this stuff as most guys do for animated cartoons.

JEFF: *Wow.*

HOWARD: If you can imagine, he's done what is basically a science-fiction strip that looks like it was designed sometime before the War of 1812. It's gorgeous stuff. I'm gonig to be writing the FAFHRD AND GREY MOUSER story for Marvel next summer, for **Mignola.** I think Mike's stuff is just great.

These guys are *better* artists than I am! I know how good I am; I recognize my own limitations and I don't have any problems working within them. But I also recognize the fact that one of the reasons I look this good is because I'm compared to most of the people working in comic books. Let's face it, being the best comic-book artist in the world is a lot like being the world's tallest midget, big deal. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *How much of what I look at in BLACK KISS is really your work? I don't really understand what your studio does.*

HOWARD: I have a background man.

JEFF: *That's it, everything else is all you?*

HOWARD: Oh yeah. You want me to take you through the process?

JEFF: *Sure.*

HOWARD: Okay. Very simply, I lay it out, I thumbnail the material for spacing.

HUGH: *Small.*

HOWARD: Yeah, two inches by three inches. I write a first draft from the thumbnails. I do a full size layout, very loose, tighten up the layout to get more detail, and then do the final draft from that. I then spot the balloons, send it to the letterer, get it back and then get into the drawing. I trace off the layout, very loose and geometric. I then have my assistant work off photographs of everything — nobody fakes *anything.*

JEFF: *I've seen things in BLACK KISS that I knew where they were, which was really fun.*

HOWARD: Dagmar's house was across the street from the studio. *(Laughter.)* It's a little house in Glendale. We haven't fu&ked anything, because we want it to feel *like* Los Angeles — in the same way that a lot of my stuff felt like New York. I wanted to do an L.A. that *I* know, which is grutty and dirty and down. I feel *much* more paranoid in Los Angeles than I *ever* have in New York.

JEFF: *Really?*

HOWARD: Sure. I've never had my *property* assaulted and abused as much as I have here. I never felt so constantly

"I always end up doing more than I want to. You

. . . every day something's wrong with my car. I've never had that much of an assault on my sensibilities, person or property. I always end up doing more than I want to. You know, working on the cleanup. And that's how it's done. You have to understand, I did FLAGG! #1 through #12 all by myself — including cleanup — because I couldn't figure out how to use an assistant. I'd worked with assistants before —

HUGH: *And you were an assistant, too.*

HOWARD: Sure, I spent years. But I couldn't figure out how to *teach* somebody to work with *me*. And I was running so late and working so fast, and FLAGG! never missed a ship date in my tenure — because I was doing seven-day weeks every week. It wasn't until I took the two issues off that I worked out a formulated system that enabled me to use an assistant.

When I came back with FLAGG! #15, *that's* when I was using an assistant; **Larry O'Neil, Denny O'Neil's** son, who is a filmmaker now, and **Dean Haspiel,** whose work is beginning to show up in various places. Two very urban New York street kids who every so often call me and teach me street talk. *(Laughter.)* I love those kids, they're really fun. I've told them both that if they want a job, they're welcome to come out here any time.

JEFF: *So, who are your assistants now?*

HOWARD: Let's see, the shop is: **Corky Lehmkuhl,** who just left. Corky had a piece in the swimsuit issue, AMAZING HEROES, that great Superman and Lois @ the beach. Corky's a piss. I've known him for years, he's an ex big, fat, surf Nazi who is now this real thin, aesthetically gorgeous, surf god. *(Laughter.)* **Nick Dubois —** all my guys have great names — who is this real tall male model type I met at the San Diego convention last year, who is also doing some animation stuff. He also works with **Mike Vosburg.** Nick's a real crackerjack guy, a real solid graphics man. As a matter of fact, he did some storyboards for me for a film presentation.

Richard Ory *was* my assistant, but he's a crew chief now. The arrangement we've got at the studio is a little different than it used to be — there are now four principals. Corky and Nick are the direct assistants, but yesterday was Corky's last day and Nick is on his own now. **Barb Rausch** has also worked with us. Barb and Rich . . . Let me give you the studio setup here. There are four principals in the studio, me, **Mike Vosburg, Shawn McManus,** and **Richard Ory.** We all sort of work together in different arcs. **Barb Rausch** is also a part of the studio, she just did a WONDER WOMAN piece for DC. She and Rich colored the WOLVERINE job that I did for Marvel, with Nick and Corky on the backgrounds. The reason there are two of them as opposed to one is Corky was part-time and Nick is new. Rich does lots of stuff. He worked with Mike on the TALES FROM THE CRYPT covers.

WHOA! PROF EMERSON! THIS IS NO WAY TO HOLD A CONVERSATION
HOY! THIS GENT IS CERTAINLY NIMBLE!
©1979 United Features Syndicate, Inc.

JEFF: *The ones on the TV show?*

HUGH: *HBO?*

HOWARD: That's Mike and Rich.

JEFF: *That's your studio! How come they don't credit you?*

HOWARD: If *I* had done the covers, there *would* have been a credit! *(Laughter.)* You ought to *see* them.

know, working on the cleanup — I did FLAGG!"

Howard assisted Gil Kane (again) on STARHAWKS, the strip.

they're really good!

JEFF: *Is there a reason why they're not using the originals?*

HOWARD: I suspect that they want to tie it in with what's in each show.

JEFF: *That's very interesting that those are out of your studio, because the last one I watched, I watched through the whole credit sequence to see who did them, and they never say.*

HOWARD: I was a little amazed that Mike didn't shoot for a credit. I also thought he should have asked for more money, but that's me. They called me on that gig, and I can't think of anybody *less* appropriate for the job than me. *(Laughter.)* I wasn't really interested. So, I turned them on to Mike, and Mike has been making them *extremely* happy. They're real pleased with the stuff that he's doing, and with good reason.

Shawn is doing DOCTOR FATE. He doesn't play much in the group. He worked with me on a couple of the GRIMJACK presentation pieces — we'll get to the movie stuff after the comics. Shawn has done some crackerjack paintings. I'm trying to get Shawn to put some color stuff together for SPY. I've recommended Mike and Shawn both. Shawn's

"I have no gut instincts when it comes to drawing."

YOU SHOULD FIND ANOTHER WAY TO EARN BLOOD MONEY!
— AND YOUR JAW IS GLASS--
--AND YOU'RE SO INEPT, YOU'RE NOT WORTH KILLING!
I'M I'M TERRIBLE
I'M NOT EVEN WINDED BY THIS! NOT EVEN BY THE SWORD!
AND IN IRON-WOLF'S STATEROOM--
YOU'VE BEEN THE DANGER PEOPLE WHO THE KING PROBE HAVE MADE THE PROBE GALAXY SAFE FROM THAT!
YOU MUST LEAVE ME! I WILL NOT HAVE YOUR DEATH ON MY CONSCIENCE!
THE BARBAROUS DARKNESS EXTENDS EVEN FARTHER THAN I THOUGHT!
WHERE WILL I GO--?
WOULD YOU SET ME ADRIFT IN SPACE?
THERE IS ONE POSSIBLE PLACE OF SAFETY--MY HOME, THE PLANET ELYSIUM!
WE CAN BE THERE IN A WEEK!

WEIRD WORLDS presents [illegible] **IRON WOLF. Created, plotted & drawn by Howard, scripted by Jenny O'Neil, and lettered by Walt Simonson.**

got some cartoon painting that will blow you away. He's doing some baseball stuff that is really funny — stuff that you would *never* imagine that you would see from a guy doing DOCTOR FATE. I'm serious, this is great shit.

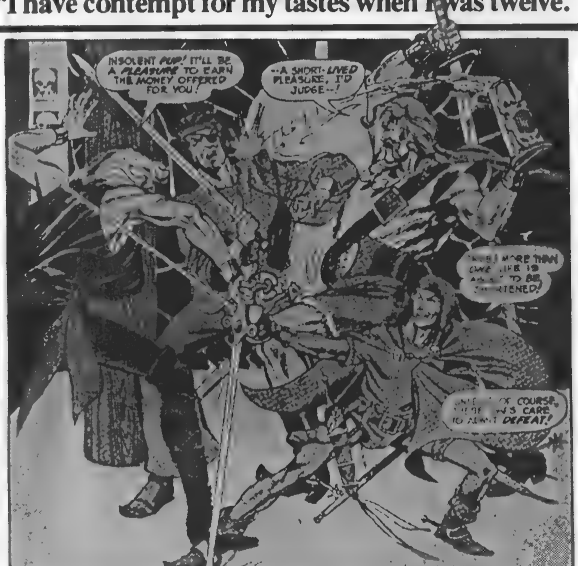
Rich crew-chiefed the color on the WOLVERINE book. He was in charge of Nick and Corky on backgrounds. He art-directed Barb's colors, and then finished them. He techniqued the shit out of it. And when I tell you that the WOLVERINE stuff is going to be a mindfuck, believe it. Unlike a lot of projects, there's been a lot of consultation. We left out *entire* backgrounds, and *painted* them in. It's not that European pretentious stuff, it's comic-book coloring but done in three dimensions. If Marvel fucks up the printing, I will shit all over the office. *(Laughter.)*

Rich is also doing the backgrounds on TWILIGHT, and I've already promoted him hard as the colorist. When they see the WOLVERINE stuff, there won't be a problem. We all sort of jump into each other's projects and have fun. It's a very convivial group, a very comfortable crowd.

JEFF: *When will the Wolverine thing be out?*

HOWARD: Summer, after the San Diego convention.

"I have contempt for my tastes when I was twelve."


INSOLENT PUP! IT'LL BE A PLEASURE TO EARN THE MONEY OFFERED FOR YOU!
--A SHORT-LIVED PLEASURE, I'D JUDGE--!
--I'M MORE THAN LIKE IS ABLE TO BE--INTENED!
--OF COURSE, IT'S CARE TO MAKE DEFEAT!

Panel from DC Comics' SWORD OF SORCERY #1 by Denny O'Neil, Howard Chaykin, and inked by The Crusty Bunkers. (Fafhrd & The Gray Mouser are creations of Fritz Leiber.)

JEFF: *Probably right around the time this comes out.*

HOWARD: WOLVERINE is a job that I laid out two weeks before I moved out of New York. It's finished, it's all in, and it's a lot of fun.

HUGH: *What kind of a format?*

HOWARD: A big fat comic book, MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVEL. *(Laughter.)* It's Nick Fury and Wolverine going around the world kicking ass and having a great time. My only regret is that I didn't do Wolverine out of the costume. I based Wolverine on one of my fellow comic-book artists, and I won't say who. *(Laughter.)* I loved drawing Nick Fury because he's kind of a pelican-faced old guy. I enjoyed drawing these characters.

I had accumulated a stack of reference, so I would say that 97% of every background shot is a cold cut shot. It moves from New York to Istanbul to Macao, it's all the hell over the place, so my NATIONAL GEOGRAPHICS were trashed. *(Laughter.)* The flashback sequences are done in black-and-white monochrome. There's one sequence showing Nick Fury in the '60s, and that is what James Bond is *supposed* to look like. It's just great.

JEFF: *So, actually, this doesn't sound like slumming at all, you really had a good time with this.*

HOWARD: A better time than I thought I would. Of course it was the easiest job that I've done in years. *(Laughter.)* Because superhero comics are so iconic that it took about as much effort to produce a 62-page book as it does any average one-issue comic book of anything else, because any of the actual stuff that I would consider important would be inappropriate.

JEFF: *It was fun for a change.*

HOWARD: It was *easy* for a change. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *That's right, drawing is not fun anymore.*

HOWARD: It's not easy either. You've got to understand, I'm not a natural draftsman. One of the reasons why I relate to Gil is we share similar problems in that sense — everything we know is a

"I worked for Gil (Kane) when I was eighteen."

learned skill. I have no gut instincts when it comes to drawing. I'm just not that *good* at it! When you see my pencils, you can tell. Believe me, I just *slave*.

HUGH: *It's funny you would say that about Gil. When you look at some of those fluid pictures of Green Lantern and whatnot —*

HOWARD: You're talking about what's on the page. I'm talking about what went into *building* it underneath.

JEFF: *What are you doing with Gil? He's certainly a favorite of mine.*

HUGH: *Me, too*

HOWARD: Gil and I weren't on speaking terms for a long time.

JEFF: *Were you one of his assistants?*

HOWARD: I worked for Gil when I was eighteen and nineteen, and then I didn't speak to him for ten years because I was so intimidated. *(Laughter.)* Seriously.

HUGH: *Chaykin intimidated?*

HOWARD: You have to understand that a lot of what I am, I learned from Gil Much of my storytelling *ouvre*, throughout the '70s, talking to guys in the business, is **Gil Kane** stories from that period. Like, this is how I got my start, this is how it worked — anecdotes that have slid in.

I filled in blacks, did zips, did some cleanup, but he wouldn't let me deliver pages because he was embarrassed at my physical appearance. *(Laughter.)* I had long hair, I was kind of grubby looking. Well, in the middle of this, "We're not working anymore! We're watching COVER GIRL because it's good for you!" *(Laughter.)* And he says, "Now, wasn't that great."

We started talking again in the early '80s. He called and asked if I'd come in and fill in for **Harvey Kurtzman** on one of these master classes in Texas — they did a master class thing with Harvey, Gil and Burne.

HUGH: *Pretty select company.*

HOWARD: Well, it was *flattering*. I said to Gil, "Is this finally the acknowledgment of the existence of my generation or what?" *(Laughter.)* I didn't go, I was just too busy, but we started talking. We ended up eating out a lot. (Last year at DC's Christmas party Mike Royer invited Gil to lunch, so I called him and we made up, and I've been talking to him every week. I was never really close to my dad, so it was nice to have a guy of his age to ask, "Should I wear this tie?" *(Laughter.)* He does give me shit about the way I wear my hair.

At any rate, we're doing a number of projects, one of which is called LEGEND. We are waiting for a contract on this book. On the other hand, both of us have decided that we'd rather do another book first. We're going to do a HIS NAME IS SAVAGE graphic novel. It was *astounding* to me that no one had ever suggested it to him. I want to do an extremely cathartic, visceral graphic novel, a serious hard-boiled book, and use that as a segue into the four-part prestige format series called LEGEND.

JEFF: *What company are we talking about?*

HOWARD: DC.

JEFF: *For both of these things?*

HOWARD: Yes. I *can't* go into LEGEND at this point because the contract papers aren't signed, but just know that it's a four-part series.

JEFF: *Existing characters in the DC Universe?*

HOWARD: No, creator owned, outside of the DC Universe, no sequels, no spin-offs, nothing — a single four-part story.

One of the things about Gil that I think he's perfectly willing to say himself is that the irony of his professional life is that he has developed an approach to material that is antithetical to the sort of stories he would intellectually like to tell. This is not to say that we're talking THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV here. But LEGEND is a story that really does have some scale that also makes use of that viscera.

JEFF: *Well, he's so wonderful, I can't wait to see something within that realm.*

HOWARD: We are going to kick ass for '90.

Here and the next page: Two examples of the material Gil Kane provided Chaykin for STARHAWKS (Gil finished these).

STARHAWKS © United Feature Syndicate, Inc.

"I wanted to basically piss in the soup."

JEFF: *What is Gil doing?*
HOWARD: Right now he's working on THE RING
JEFF: *What?*
HOWARD: Wagner! A four-part adaptation for DC
JEFF: *That's interesting.*
HOWARD: Maybe to you. *(Laughter.)*
HUGH: *I always have trouble with Craig Russell's adaptations of operas. They're beautiful, and I really like him as an inker, but —*
JEFF: *Me, too.*
HUGH: *— but I just have a tough time* reading *it.*
HOWARD: I'm real excited about the idea of seeing his characters with my viscera, that kind of language. He was raised at 420 Saratoga Avenue in the '30s, I was raised at 370 Saratoga Avenue in the '50s, we went to the same grammar school — the levels of connection are bizarre, tons of shit. I pulled out a **Claude Thornhill** CD, he was a great bandleader of the '40s I mean, I throw things at him that prime memory. Gil's life is one of extraordinary anecdotes.
HUGH: *You were talking about using a letter in the advertising.*
HOWARD: Yeah.
HUGH: *In your contracts do you specify what the advertising or promotion will be?*
HOWARD: No, it's just that I don't trust *any* of the companies that I work for to deliver advertising.
HUGH: *Will they accept this?*
HOWARD: They want help and I don't charge them for it. For example, the SHADOW promotion, that was *my* promotion. "God help the guilty!" was my line. When you consider the fact that **Obadiah** is an advertising man, what promotion that First does is disappointing.

As for the TWILIGHT material . . . I'd like, before it comes out, to reprint some of that old material in a couple of issues, with **Kevin Nowlan** doing the covers, and just lead that in to TWILIGHT. It's a *take* on these characters. I'm going to be accused of raping them. But then again, after I did FLAGG! I was also told that I should have done comics as good as SGT. FURY or KID COLT. OUTLAW People still have too much respect for their tastes when they were twelve — that's really it.
HUGH: *You've been through this now with both THE SHADOW and BLACKHAWK.*
JEFF: *What do you feel about the way that they continued both of those series?*
HOWARD: I *like* what **Rich Burchett** is doing. I didn't much like what he was doing in ACTION WEEKLY. But he and **Pasko,** I'm really impressed! They're bouncy, they're funny. **Burchett** has always been a good designer, he put a good picture together, but he seemed like he was a little bit unsure on that stuff in ACTION WEEKLY. But BLACKHAWK kicks ass! And Marty seems to be cooking! It's impressive stuff. I mean that, no bullshit. I like the look and feel of the book, thrills, chills and laughs. It doesn't take itself that rigidly seriously, but it's got some ideas. And they do some research.
JEFF: *And THE SHADOW?*
HOWARD: I absolutely adore **Kyle Baker's** stuff, I really do. I was so pissed when I found out he'd given away that BLACKHAWK cover he did for ACTION WEEKLY — I was furious, I could have killed that bastard. I think he's swell.
HUGH: *He's got a great sense of design.*
HOWARD: Have you seen COWBOY WALLY?
HUGH: *You know, I saw it but I didn't buy it.*
HOWARD: Aren't you ashamed?
HUGH: *Yeah, I am.*
HOWARD: COWBOY WALLY needs your support. I'd like to write the movie. It's a funny, witty book. Kyle is a terrific writer, it's just sensational stuff.
JEFF: *Let's segue into the film stuff.*
HOWARD: Sure!
JEFF: *I've heard you were working on BLACK KISS as one of your film projects?*
HOWARD: Yes.
JEFF: *How far along is that?*

"You read it like you're used to reading a comic book. You

HOWARD: Well, we're in the process of cutting a deal.

JEFF: *So you've got someone interested?*

HOWARD: Yeah, we're working with an independent producer with whom we're doing a number of other projects. They're producing BLACK KISS, we're also involved in a number of other things — a telepathy project and an historical project.

JEFF: *Did anyone come to you about that project, or did you have to come to them?*

HOWARD: Well, it organically developed. We've been out there hitting the pavement since we had an act written we were hoping we could get away with an act, and we finally had to do the whole screenplay.

JEFF: *This is a naive question and I'm sure I know the answer already, but isn't handing them the comic almost like handing them the screenplay anyway? Would it have to be that much different?*

HOWARD: In the same way that in the paperback business when I wanted to do Westerns I had to do a Western painting, even though I had spacemen with guns, there is *no* interest on *anyone's* part until –

JEFF: *You have to speak their language.*

HOWARD: I delivered a screenplay, I got a job. That's it, you know. Our sample has gotten nice attention. It's been very frustrating, particularly since the strike. We've had lots of meetings but pitches aren't being bought. We're working on spec at this point — lots of spec work all of the time. But we do have a couple of deals, we're working on this film here, and we're hawking around.

JEFF: *What would you say BLACK KISS's chances are of actually getting to the screen?*

HOWARD: Not bad, because it's budgeted very low — I might add also that every schmuck in the comics business who has heard that it's been licensed has made the immediate presumption that it's been licensed to someone like **Henri Pichard** or **Chuck Vincent**. *(Laughter.)* And I guess I would expect that from people who think that an adult comic book is about a guy who runs around in his underwear fighting crime.

I have *no* interest in doing hard-core films. The *only* reason I did a hard-core comic book is because nobody else was. I wanted to piss in the soup. And now that I've done it, I don't want to do it again. I've done that already.

JEFF: *Do you think that was a mistake?*

HOWARD: Doing BLACK KISS?

JEFF: *Yeah.*

HOWARD: By no means, it's a *very* liberating thing to do. It was cathartic, it was liberating, it was *fun!*

HUGH: *Was it lucrative?*

HOWARD: *Oh! (Laughter.)* Mother of pearl, you bet. It's outselling its nearest competitor three to one

JEFF: *What is a competitor in that field? I'm not sure I understand when you say that.*

HOWARD: Independents. Bear in mind that with BLACK KISS Vortex has made a major leap forward. But nobody's buying it because it's so disgusting! Thank you *very* much! *(Laughter.)* I made a remark in AMAZING HEROES that BLACK KISS is about stuff that no AMAZING HEROES reader would be interested in, and I stand by that remark.

JEFF: *You're probably right.*

HOWARD: Because most AMAZING HEROES readers read comic books not to be entertained but to be reassured.

JEFF: *But then that means that there's another 100,000 people out there that actually do like that stuff.*

HOWARD: It's selling fine. It's made me more money than I expected. It's going to be in print forever, in various forms. The film will be markedly different for a *number* of reasons.

JEFF: *It has to be. The comic is real*

Fanzine illustration by Howard.

expect these characters to *tell* you what they're doing."

HOME, BEING PAVEL... HUB WORLD OF ABRAXAS' MULTI-PLANET EMPIRE...
WHERE, AFTER A PAY OF RED TAPE, HE CONFERS WITH STARBUCK, HEREDITARY CHAIRWOMAN OF ABRAXAS.
WORTHLESS?
RIGHT. IT'S IN PERFECT SHAPE, BUT FOR ONE THING...
ITS ENTIRE OPERATION IS KEYED TO THE HAND-PRINTS OF ITS INVENTOR.
WHO IS--?
DIEGO PORTMAN.
PACIFIST ENGINEER... DISAPPEARED DURING THE WAR...
FIND HIM.
I'LL PAY YOU 5 MILLION CR IN ANY CURRENCY YOU WISH.
FUCK THAT, SEÑORITA. I COULD MAKE THAT MUCH BY PUTTING A DAGGER IN YOUR THROAT.
SO?

©1989 Howard V. Chaykin

Chaykin's CODY STARBUCK, from the pages of STAR*REACH #4.

dense and I don't think a film can be that dense and —

HOWARD: Beyond that! There's the technical consideration that the only way you could find a man to play the role of a woman convincingly is to make him a fairly unattractive woman. The fact is that a transvestite always looks five years older, because men's faces, the very texture of the skin of a man's face, is five years older — so a 25-year-old man would look like a 30-year-old woman at best. So it's not going to be easy. And you can't convince me that you can find a transvestite who is going to be that good an actress, you know what I'm saying. So, there's a lot of shifting and moving.

HUGH: *Have you envisioned any particular castings?*

HOWARD: Oh, yeah, very definitely. The guy who I see playing Ricky is . . . the guy who was on MY SISTER SAM, Joel something. He's kind of a big bearish kind of guy who crochets. Ideally I'd like to see **Ray Sharkey** play Cass, but that might stretch the budget too far. I really like **Sharkey**. I've liked **Sharkey** since THE IDOLMAKER. I mention that movie to everybody, nobody's seen it. *(Laughter.)* You guys, I knew you'd seen it.

HUGH: *It's part of the biz.*

HOWARD: I saw scenes from CLASS STRUGGLE IN BEVERLY HILLS the other day, and he's the moral focus of the film in a very weird sort of way. He's *wonderful!*

JEFF: *If money were no object, who would the women characters be?*

HOWARD: Well, **Kim Basinger,** obviously. It makes perfect sense. **Basinger** is the 1980s. '90s equivalent of a '50s blonde, and that really is Beverly.

HUGH: *She's like almost a nasty Angie Dickinson.*

HOWARD: I'm one of those guys . . . I mean, I like gentile women a lot, but I really don't find **Angie Dickinson** all that appealing, never have. **Cybill Shepherd** is another one I just can't work up a jones for, you know. A little too flatfaced. I mean, I spent my youth chasing guilt-ridden Catholic girls who desperately wanted to sleep with black guys, but they

"All of the sex is going to be left out; it's implied."

were too uptight so they slept with Jews. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *So, BLACK KISS is fairly well along?*

HOWARD: Yeah. I hope by the time this is in print we'll be writing the screenplay, if not finished.

JEFF: *I'm sure everybody, even with your comment about the X-rated directors, is wondering —*

HOWARD: It's going to be R-rated. All of the sex is going to be left out, it's all going to be implied.

JEFF: *It would have to be.*

HOWARD: Of course. Come on, I don't want to spend two hours watching all of those people fuck. It's going to be a '90s color film with the sensibilities of RKO and 20th Century Fox in the late '40s.

JEFF: *Works for me. When you wrote BLACK KISS, the comic, were you thinking graphic novel?*

HOWARD: No. In this case I thought of it as ten-page chapters.

GIDEON FAUST — Warlock At Large (STAR*REACH #5) by Len Wein & Howard Chaykin.

--BUT IT IS SIMPLY NOT ENOUGH!
MUST DRAW ON THE WELL-SPRINGS OF MY LIFE... PUT THE SMOLDERING SPARK OF MY VERY EXISTANCE INTO ONE FINAL SPELL...
...AND THEN UNLEASH THAT ENCHANTMENT...
...THUS!!
FAUST CLENCHES HIS EYES TIGHT, IN OBVIOUS PAIN--FOR HE IS TRULY ONE WITH THE ELEMENTAL FORCES NOW--AND AT HIS URGING, THE POLISHED WOODEN FLOOR OF THE NOW-DESERTED MUSIC HALL SHIMMERS--
--AND ABRUPTLY DISAPPEARS!
FOR AN INSTANT, JUDGE AMOS GAVILLAN HANGS SUSPENDED IN SPACE, THEN HIS POWER FLEES BLINDLY BEFORE HIS PANIC--AND HE PLUNGES SCREAMING, HEAD-OVER-HEELS, INTO THE HEART OF THE BUBBLING HELLPIT!
©1976 Len Wein/Howard V. Chaykin

"I want you to clip every three-way you can find."

JEFF: *Really? There was never a chapter head.*

HOWARD: Because I knew that Lou was going to be writing a synopsis, and it was monthly, and it was ten pages. There was no need to recap.

HUGH: *The synopsis works when you're buying it and reading it every month, or however often it comes out — But I just went back and read the first nine issues, and they read great straight through.*

HOWARD: But talking about the *sex*, I'm tired of it already because I got tired of drawing fucking.

JEFF: *There's not that many ways to do it.*

HUGH: *Although you came up with a few interesting concepts. (Laughter.) When Cass comes back to the house looking for a place to hide out and gets into the three-way, that was great.*

HOWARD: The way I worked that one out, I said, "Corky, I want you to take every issue of ADULT VIDEO REVIEW and clip every three-way you can find." We put them on the wall, edited it down to fourteen, kept editing, bringing it down, and we finally had it all laid out.

HUGH: *Well, I guarantee you, there was no reader who expected —*

HOWARD: I set it up from the first page of the first issue

HUGH: *Yeah, when she says something to the effect that there's just one little thing that's different.*

HOWARD: And she says, "I'm a five foot seven inch blonde, and I do mean seven inches." *(Laughter.)*

HUGH: *But, really, you just don't pick those things up at first.*

HOWARD: You're expecting all of these characters to refer to themselves by their first and last names, to *tell* you what they're doing.

JEFF: *Where do you think the audience for that book is coming from? Is it coming from people that want to see you drawing people fuck, or —*

HOWARD: Some.

JEFF: *— is it coming from people who actually want to have an adult story told in comic-book form?*

HOWARD: Some. **Simonson** seems to like the book — I gave **Simonson** the

From Atlas Comics. THE SCORPION series by Chaykin (with help from Kaweckl, Wrightson, Kaluta, Simonson & Ed Davis).

©1979 Seaboard Periodicals, Inc

"There are elements of enormous comedy in BLACK KISS."

cover of #7, he really liked it. **Grant** calls me up every time an issue comes out to tell me how much he loves it, 'cause he was cracking up. I think that there are elements of enormous comedy in BLACK KISS — comedy of recognition, comedy of acknowledgment. But again, comic-book people don't have much of a life, so they don't see it. When I was in New York on a signing tour, I was *amazed* at the people who showed up at St. Mark's. I was expecting a hard-core, comic-book, new wave crowd, but it was a hard-core *yuppie* crowd, a lot of suit and tie types.

HUGH: *How do you fit them into that little store?*

HOWARD: They had a line out into the streets — it was really weird.

JEFF: *Where did these people find out about it?*

HOWARD: The book got interesting play.

JEFF: *Oh, yeah, the PENTHOUSE thing.*

HOWARD: PENTHOUSE did very nice by us.

HUGH: *The last time I was in New York I was staying in the Parke-Meridian, which is* very *chic, and as I was checking in one evening I saw a guy sitting in the bar there — and this was early on in the series — and he had on one of the brand new BLACK KISS T-shirts. (Laughter.)*

HOWARD: No shit! I love it!

HUGH: *I just went up to him and said, "Right on, man." (Laughter.)*

HOWARD: Well, the thing about the BLACK KISS T-shirt is it sold like *crazy* because it didn't look like a comic-book T-shirt — everybody assumed it was a band. We had it out first.

HUGH: *This guy was shocked when somebody came up and knew what the hell it was.*

HOWARD: Was he embarrassed?

HUGH: *No, he was kinda groovin' to it.*

HOWARD: Oh, great!

HUGH: *The other people didn't know what the fuck we were talking about.*

HOWARD: I love when that shit happens.

JEFF: *Now, when you started BLACK KISS I remember you said it was going to be an erotic horror story.*

HOWARD: Yes.

JEFF: *I see it less as that as I see more of a film noir kind of story.*

HOWARD: It becomes a horror story.

If I do another erotic book of any kind, it's going to have to be something screamingly funny, because I've *done* the intense. I had to work up a *lot* of intensity for this, because there's very little in *me* that can do that kind of material without more comedy, and I didn't want to shoehorn any more laughs into it. And it gets *uglier* at the end.

JEFF: *Okay. So, is BLACK KISS the easiest film project, or is that hard to translate, something you've done in one medium to another medium?*

HOWARD: I have no idea. I really don't know. BLACK KISS as an outline has given me trouble from word one. For example, I asked John to give me an

Two-page spread from Alan Moore's AMERICAN FLAGG mini-series (issues 21-27): LUSTBUSTERS. Artwork: Don Lomax, Lettering: Ken Bruzenak.

WOAH... LOOKS LIKE A BOOPY BUSTER!
TELL ME ABOUT IT! JEW! WHEN THE BOOM TO HIM! REICH! LEAVE ME ALONE! DIE! OH ME...
WELL, IF YOU NEED SOMEBODY TO HOLD YOUR HAIR ON, THERE'S OTHER CANDIDATES!
DAMN RIGHT! INCLUDING THE MORAL LEADER BEHIND THE COUNTER! VIDEO TRASH THAT PREYED KARMA FOR BEICA'S BUTTOCK!
OH... DIDN'T YOU HEAR?
HE'S JUST SOME OLD ANARCHIST RE-RUN!
IT'S BE A SPECIAL CEREMONY! BOYS & MEN'S CLOSEN "IS" CLOWNS" AND O'R OUTFITS...
I WANT TO MAKE ON MY DESK B MONDAY!
©1989 First Comics/H. Chaykin

"My skills are more valid in films than they are in comics."

order to it, in terms of the setup from #1 through #12, because I couldn't get the breakdown on it, and John is a phenomenal plot mechanic. That was when we realized that we were just being too true to the material, so we threw a lot of it out.

The major difference in the film is that Cass is going to be a better guy. The atmosphere and the ambiance will be the same

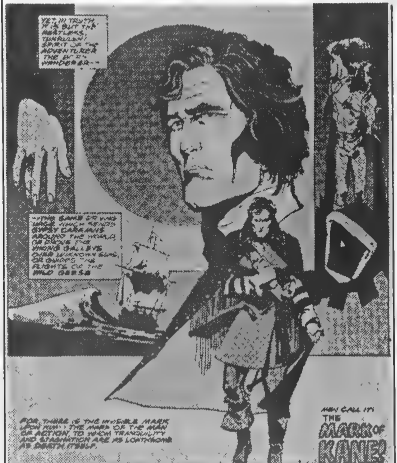
JEFF: *Great, film noir for the '90s.*

HOWARD: Yeah! If Gary Groth really does believe that the reason the films of the late '40s were dark was because they were saving money, we'll do the same thing here. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *So, this is old news by now, but what did you actually do on ROBOCOP?*

HOWARD: Nothing. I was *asked* to design a car. Now, I have *no* skill in designing automobiles. And bear in mind, at the time I had never *driven!* *(Laughter.)* Mostly, I think it was to

"Iron Man is the only character at Marvel I want to do."


YET IN TRUTH IT IS BUT AN EMPTY LAIR FOR THE ADVENTURER THAT HE IS WANDERING AWAY.
THE GAME OF KING WHICH HE PLAYS GYPSY CARAVANS ABOUT THE WORLD OR THE GAME OF LOVE. THEIR BOOTY IS GUNS OR CHARMS — THE PRIZE OF THE KING GOES
FOR THERE IS THE MYSTERY MARK UPON HIM! THE MARK OF THE MAN OF ACTION, TO WHOM TRANQUILITY AND STAGNATION ARE AS LOATHSOME AS DEATH ITSELF.
NOW CALL IT! THE MARK OF KANE!

THE MARK OF KANE (MARVEL PREMIERE #33, 1976) by Thomas & Chaykin (adapted from REH's story "Red Shadows").

thank me for all the stuff they were borrowing. *(Laughter.)* I got friendly with **Ed Newmeier** very briefly, but we haven't spoken in years. I've known **John Davison** for about fourteen years, but not well.

JEFF: *Through comics.*

HOWARD: No. John was to **Roger Corman** what **Roy Thomas** was to **Stan Lee,** the first guy to run the company after. John's a real neat guy. He did AIRPLANE, has some interesting credentials. And he was pals with a bunch of guys that I knew. I was staying with a guy named **Dave Armstrong** and it was my last night in town, and he said, "Do you want to see SHANE?" These are pre-video days. We go over to John's, get the keys, and go over to a garage which is *stacked* with films. It was great.

So, I didn't do anything on ROBOCOP.

JEFF: *In film, do you feel like you need a partner, or just that it's worked out well so far?*

HOWARD: One of the things I learned working in comics is that I need an editor. I like working with an editor. And I'm very disappointed with most of the guys I worked with as editors.

One of the *rare* exceptions to that is **Andrew Helfer. Helfer** is a fuck up, a monster, and a complete asshole, but I love working with him, I really do. I say this with no contradiction. I respect Andrew, but he's the absolute worst administrator I've ever met in my life — thank God for **Kevin Dooley. But** Andrew is one of the smartest, sharpest people I've met, certainly in this business. I called Andrew once after he hadn't taken my calls for three weeks and said, "If you don't call me back tomorrow I'm telling the Germans where your parents are!" *(Laughter.)*

HUGH: *He's somebody who came from outside of comic books, isn't he?*

HOWARD: I don't know. Andrew has been at DC for about eight years, he started as **Joe Orlando's** assistant. But back to the point: John and I work together because we're both very good for each other in terms of editorial. We have very different skills and our skills don't overlap. I'm strong on dialogue and character, John is strong on structure and plot mechanics. He's *very* strong on that. The GRIMJACK plotting sessions were unbelievable, for that reason.

John and I are working on stuff separately as well. He's doing DICK TRACY on his own. And he's promoting some other projects. He's got a dream Western that is just a concept – this could be the thing to bring Westerns back to comics, a *brilliant* piece of work.

JEFF: *Why does he want to bother working in comics after seeing how disenchanted you have become?*

HOWARD: It's good bread and butter. Film work is a lot of spec so you need a day job, and his day job is writing comics. We constantly argue, we're at each other's throats all of the time, but there is an equanimity to the material, it's an equal partnership.

JEFF: *What's the film business like compared to the comics field?*

HOWARD: Different. My skills are much more valid in films than they are in comics.

JEFF: *In what respect?*

HOWARD: I'm articulate, I'm reasonably glib, and I think quickly on my feet, and I'm interested in people as characters as opposed to plot devices. The nice thing right now is that an enormous number of people in executive positions around this country are old fans of mine. My attorney is a guy who I did a Batman drawing for when he was seventeen, that kind of stuff. We're getting old as we speak, and isn't it wonderful that we all look so boyish! *(Laughter.)*

So, it's different. It's more endless in terms of the preparation. Even though comics is a production business, it's still very hands on. You can *make* a comic book. The process is endless in film. For example, we've been pitching like crazy at Touchstone for six months to a year. We're fairly close with a couple of people out there, one guy in particular. We developed a rock 'n' roll film which we thought was a go, and we were brought in to talk about another film project.

They called us, "We want to do a movie about telepathy, what do you think?" They listened to us for awhile and

"I don't feel that I play down to my audience."

then they said, "Well, we really want to do a teenage comedy, what do you think?" And I said, "I think it's the first idea you came up with and it's real kneejerk." I come up with an idea in the middle of a meeting that nobody seemed to hear. We left and I talked to John, and we called these guys who we're doing BLACK KISS with, and they said, "That's the movie." Ultimately, it's developed into something called OPEN BOOK, and we're pitching it to **Tom Lane.**

HUGH: *What about FLAGG!?*

HOWARD: FLAGG! is sitting at **Larry Gordon's** waiting for **Rick Obadiah.**

JEFF: *Why, does he have to be involved?*

HOWARD: Yes. I'm a corporation. The *reason* I'm a corporation is that in this country the law states that you can't license a character in perpetuity if you are an individual — you *have* to be a company. *That* was the *only* reason. If First goes out of business tomorrow, my characters and my material revert to me immediately without litigation. Other guys will have to go through the legal process. So I paid for the corporation for that purpose — *that's* the deal.

So, FLAGG! is represented by First as an agent. I'm hoping that with the success of BATMAN there will be some getting on the stick. I'm also involved with the GRIMJACK project.

JEFF: *How far along is that?*

HOWARD: A treatment and four presentation pieces, and we're pitching. We're also in the process of developing TIME3.

JEFF: *How about the NICK FURY project, do you have anything to do with that?*

HOWARD: I don't know anything about it, nobody tells me anything. IRON MAN is being done at Universal. Iron Man is the only character at Marvel that I would ever want to do as a comic book.

JEFF: *As a comic book?*

HOWARD: Yeah. Toss out all of the shit and start from scratch, and do a story about a guy who has to deal with the fact that he is always attached to this box, that he's living in a machine and that he's the engine. I'd like to play wit that. But **Mark Grunwald** and **Tom DeFalco** are running Marvel Comics right now. *(Laughter.)* So you're going to have comic book that look like cereal premiums

JEFF: *Ain't it the truth.*

HOWARD: Every time I see those books, I think they're reprints.

What else? We're pitching GRIMJACK, we're developing TIME3 and a lot of other stuff in various stages of development and I can't talk about it. I can give you a title and a basic run.

What we're doing with GRIMJACK is a romantic story — the elements of CASABLANCA and THE MALTESE FALCON against the background of Cynosure. TIME3 we're trying to develop as a whodunit — what I'd love to see is **Jeff Goldblum** and **Geena Davis** star, with **Bobby McFerrin** and **Kim Basinger.**

JEFF: *There's two things that come through here. We're not talking to you as an artist anymore — it's something I still have to get used to, I know Howard Chaykin as the artist who is a writer. I don't know if I want to get used to you just as a writer, because I'm going to miss that artwork.*

HOWARD: No, you won't, somebody will come along to rip it off. *(Laughter.)* You have to understand, Jeff, that part of my career, particularly in the past five years, has been working in fairly small venues. One of the things I've been solicited to do is an article about comics as a secret strip mine motherlode of referential material for the film industry. Recently I realized that *I'm* a strip mine for the comic book industry, because I can be ripped off and picked over because I reach such a small band.

So, I'm not particularly interested. I planned to spend my life in comic books, but I also didn't plan to get this old. I'm not taken that seriously as a talent, in terms of the comic-book business.

JEFF: *By who?*

HOWARD: By the audience! For the most part they have one idea and either

THE RETURN OF CODY STARBUCK (a one-shot) from Star*Reach Productions (Mike Friedrich).

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"What passes for characterization in comics is whining posture."

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it's lurid or patronizing or condescending. Very little humor, and *absolutely* no irony. And I'm not interested in an audience that thinks that stuff is real good.

JEFF: *If guys like you leave it behind, there's not much of a reason for guys like us to stick around.*

HOWARD: I've been saying that for years.

JEFF: *Well, I think that's unfortunate. I still see — and I know you have the same vision — that somewhere there is actually still an adult reader.*

HOWARD: I think so. Unfortunately, what I think really happened was that **Kurtzman** produced adult comics, and nobody paid any attention. They were too interested in the horror and the science-fiction stuff. Believe me, as a kid I didn't see the war stuff's worth at all. I find it astounding that I have to recommend to guys that have been working in the business for years that they might take a look at **Kurtzman's** war books "I don't like war comics!" They're still thinking that the subject matter is important — they don't *know!*

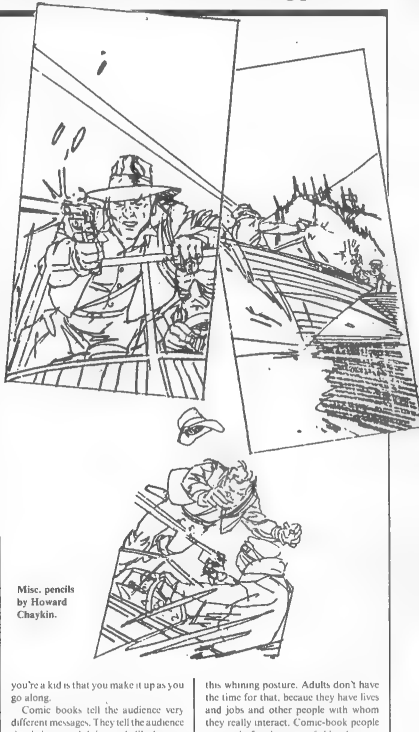
HUGH: *As opposed to telling a story.*

HOWARD: As I said, I had this page of ARKHAM ASYLUM read to me, and this guy in his art directions demonstrates the fact that he's read **Freud, Krafft-Ebing, Jung,** *tons* of material on early religion, and this is all to service Killer Croc and the Mad Hatter. *(Laughter.)* Do you see any irony here?

JEFF: *Yes. Can you do better in films? Do you still have to play down to your audience?*

HOWARD: I don't play down to my audience — that's been my failing in life. *(Laughter.)* What you've got in comic books is those half a million people, and what they've got is a very specific, line by line list of what excellent means. The movie industry is mass market, a lowest common denominator having *no* idea what good is, so you at least have the opportunity to accidentally win.

You can't win with comics unless you share the sensibilities of the audience, and I don't. The audience in comics, as I've said more than once, believe that the world and the universe is an intrinsically just place and that evil is an intrusion, like Jews in Germany. They are constantly astounded and shocked to discover that it's not like that at all. It's not that the world is intrinsically *evil*, but there is no law. All of us at one point or another have realized that we're adults but we've never had the curriculum given to us. What they never tell you when you're a kid is that you make it up as you go along.



Misc. pencils by Howard Chaykin.

Comic books tell the audience very different messages. They tell the audience that being an adult is simply like being a teenager only taller, and that you are entitled to the same range of expectation and acceptance. I cannot tell an audience that it's okay to whine, publicly misbehave, and just come on as if the world owes you anything. What passes for characterization in comic books today is this whining posture. Adults don't have the time for that, because they have lives and jobs and other people with whom they really interact. Comic-book people are ready for that sort of thing because they have no lives, their jobs are meaningless, and generally speaking the people with whom they share their lives have the same sensibilities.

I don't have a lot of contempt for the comic-book audience, because I come out of it myself. On the other hand, I

"I like comics a lot, but I don't keep any in the house."

don't have a lot of respect for their tastes Therefore, I can't take any worship seriously. I'm concerned about guys who *clearly* have a *contempt* for that audience, who also thrive on that worship. That lack of irony is very destructive.

JEFF: *So it leaves you at the point where you have to look elsewhere?*

HOWARD: Every time I say anything like this, the presumption is that I'm on some high-handed moral horse. I'm *not!* I simply want to see guys produce material that is unpretentious and fun, that doesn't have to be apologized for or explained. **Chester Brown** is doing that. I like comics a lot, I really do. But I don't keep any in the house

JEFF: *That's right, Howard, you didn't show us your comic-book collection.*

HOWARD: Nothing goes by you. *(Laughter.)* I haven't had a comic-book collection since I was sixteen years old. I got rid of them the minute I realized it was not the right thing to do.

JEFF: *The minute you went into the business, really.*

HOWARD: I feel you have to separate yourself from being a fan and a professional — professionals shouldn't be fans.

When I was starting out in the business none of the guys had any love for the material, and I thought, "Oh, I can't wait until we run the business, when the fans are in charge!" We really fucked it up, because the fans who *ran* the business were superhero fans and they did away with everything else.

JEFF: *Let's end this, then, with this question: Why can't adult comics work? Is it really a marketing problem? Is it the fact that the comic-book people don't have the right marketing savvy to get beyond the audience they have?*

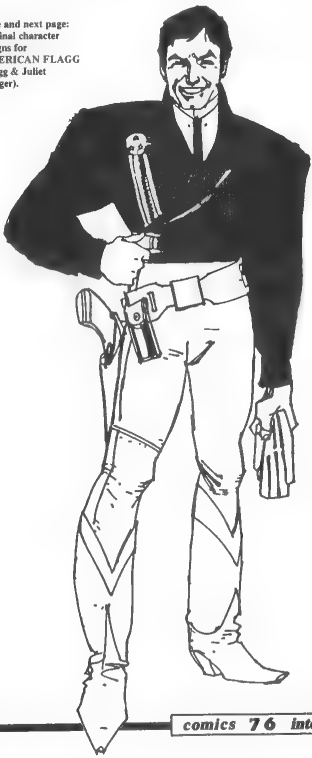
HOWARD: There's a lot of answers. I mean, I think MAUS is an adult comic book. It's filled with flaws, but it's a good piece of work. I feel the same way about **Harvey Pekar's** AMERICAN SPLENDOR. And I think both of those remarks were very generous, considering what both of those men have said about me.

On the other hand, I believe that comics as *popular* fiction, in terms of reaching a mass audience, is *choking* on its own bile. You're going to see material *like* AMERICAN SPLENDOR and MAUS emerge. But comic-book people still think you can sell guys in underwear fighting crime to a mass audience, and I don't think you can, except in the summer as a novelty item and then it goes away.

I was trying to explain to people during the whole thing with the DARK KNIGHT stuff, when it was breaking outside of the market that the real reason it was getting the press was that it was perceived as a sequel to the TV series, the last time anybody in the real world had ever been aware of the existence of Batman. The world didn't know that Batman existed once the series was canceled, because nobody in the United States knows of the existence of comics any more than you know of the existence of coin collecting.

So, you're not going to reach an adult

Here and next page: Original character designs for AMERICAN FLAGG (Flagg & Juliet Krieger).



"Comics as *popular* fiction is *choking* on its own bile."

comic-book audience with Batman of the future. The BATMAN movie is the big summer hit, but once it's finished it's not going to affect an adult comics market. If you want to do adult comics, take the sort of novels that adults read and do comics of them. Don't *reduce* them, don't *trivialize* them, as so many people will in comics.

I am being solicited to do a premise that I have been playing with called APRIL IN PARIS, about a black bandleader trapped in Paris during the occupation, in a deadly and romantic triangle with a half-Jewish cabaret singer and a fanatical SS officer jazz fan. Both of them are sleeping with the girl, and the jazz fan SS officer doesn't know what to do. I'd like to do it in 300 pages.

HUGH: *Sounds like a European album.*

HOWARD: Not like a European album, like an American *paperback*, like the size of a trade paperback.

JEFF: *The size of MAUS but less panels to a page?*

HOWARD: Yes, done decoratively, blue line, romantic. It's going to cost a fortune.

JEFF: *And take you forever.*

HOWARD: Probably.

HUGH: *Is society geared to pick something up like that?*

HOWARD: The problem is that it would probably be too damn expensive.

HUGH: *Where would you sell it, right in the grocery store checkout line?*

HOWARD: That's the problem. I don't think superhero comics have any place in mainstream adult fiction. I think the tenets and elements of the superhero form, without the costumes, are going to be showing up in film like a motherfucker over the next five to ten years. In the same way that Stan ripped off MORE THAN HUMAN for THE X-MEN in the first place, you're going to be seeing people going *back* to MORE THAN HUMAN *through* THE X-MEN on a number of films. Trust me.

I do think you're going to see adult comics, but I think that the comics that are going to reach a mass market audience are maybe the novelty items like MAUS, like AMERICAN SPLENDOR, like DARK KNIGHT.

JEFF: *How do they plan to market BLACK KISS when it comes out in a book form?*

HOWARD: We're going to start with mail order, we've done very well there without the comic-book audience. But again, that was a novelty item unto itself. "A dirty comic book in a plastic bag, how weird." I don't want to do adaptations.

JEFF: *You don't want to do adaptations. I don't blame you.*

HOWARD: They asked me to do the DICK TRACY adaptation comic book. I don't see any point.

JEFF: *Do they have interest at Piranha in doing APRIL IN PARIS?*

HOWARD: Mark *wants* me to do this book. But it's at least a year down the line, and I'm not sure it's going to be all that financially rewarding.

Am I still talking into this machine?

"When I was twelve, I used to read SPIROU and

JEAN GIRAUD

It is a constant source of puzzlement to foreign comics professionals why their American counterparts believe that the X-MEN, or even BATMAN for that matter, are popular series. To a foreign eye, they are just like big fish in a very, very small pond, a pond which unfortunately seems to be growing smaller every year . . .

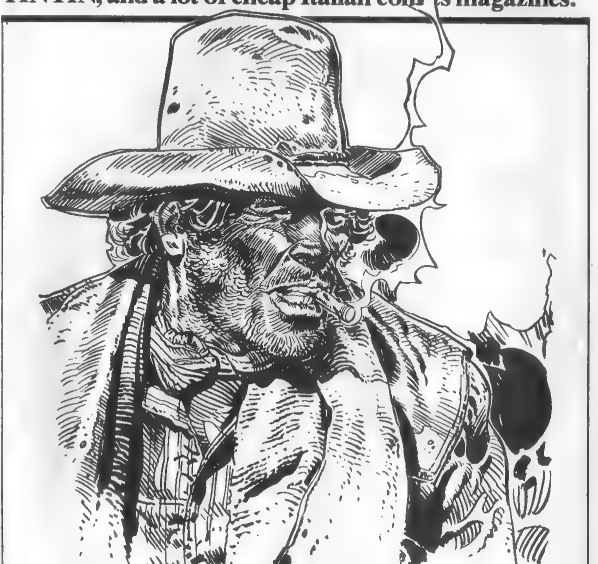
Let us take a step back and try to understand the reason for this attitude. As usual, the answer can be found in figures. At the very top of the comics heap in this country are such giants as GARFIELD and PEANUTS — Europeans don't differentiate much between comic strips and comic books. In Europe, one finds series such as ASTERIX, TINTIN and the SMURFS, whose appeal reach a mainstream audience in the millions!

The more traditional adventure strips do not perform as well, but the most successful ones, such as CORTO MALTESE or VALERIAN, still manage to come up with figures that would put any Marvel or DC book to shame. for example, a new LT. BLUEBERRY "album" which retails for about $7 generates immediate net sales in France and Belgium alone of 300,000 copies, and that's not taking into account foreign editions or the fact that the book will remain on the shelves for an indefinite time.

Indeed, it is virtually impossible to underestimate Lt. Blueberry's success in worldwide terms: twenty-seven books including a spin-off series (now drawn by Colin Wilson of JUDGE DREDD fame), spanning twenty-five years of publishing history, translated literally all over the world, merchandised, and even the subject of a tentative live action feature.

All artwork accompanying this interview is © 1989 Charlier/Giraud/Dargaud, unless otherwise noted.

TINTIN, and a lot of cheap Italian comics magazines."



Yet, in spite of all this, it is with a certain amount of caution that we are today contemplating the first serious publication of LT. BLUEBERRY in the American comic-book market. The reasons for such caution are obvious, among them the fact that LT. BLUEBERRY is a western, a genre considered the kiss of death in a market where superheroes reign! It is indeed a tribute to Marvel's faith in Moebius, and genuine appreciation of the Lt. Blueberry material, that they did not falter when approached with the idea of publishing it!

Yet, it was the logical third step, after the Moebius books, and THE INCAL, in the publication of the works of Jean "Moebius" Giraud. However, in a concession to his American audience, who knows him better as Moebius, the LT. BLUEBERRY books will be published under the "Moebius" name rather than the "Giraud" signature, which is rather funny, since Giraud first adopted his "Moebius" pseudonym precisely to distance his more personal fantasy work from his commercial western output!

So, this seemed like a good time to have another talk with Moebius, to help the American fans to place LT. BLUEBERRY in the context of his remarkable thirty-year career . . .

JEAN-MARC LOFFICIER: *When you started your professional career in the early 1960s, you already had illustrative credits, so you probably could have become a top-notch commercial artist. Why did you choose to go into comics instead?*

JEAN GIRAUD: You must understand that I am a product of comics. I always loved comics. When I was twelve, I used to read SPIROU and TINTIN, and also

"Illustrative work doesn't generally work in comics."

a lot of cheap Italian comics magazines, which were really incredible. They had strips like SUPERBOY, no relation to the DC character, and TARGA, which was a Tarzan rip-off, and JIM TORO, and even a great comics adaptation of Mark Twain's TOM SAWYER! I traded these magazines with my friends at school, then I used to run back to my room to read them lying on my bed!

I also loved the classic American comic strips, like MANDRAKE, THE PHANTOM, PRINCE VALIANT and FLASH GORDON. I also discovered the great French illustrator **Gustave Dore** at about the same age, and I was very impressed with his art. But, overall, comics were still more fun

I don't think I could have gravitated toward becoming a commercial illustrator, at least not just for the fun of it. Even when I was a small boy, I was more drawn toward drawing comics rather than, say, a portrait of my grandmother, or a landscape, or a painting of my cat. Doing comics was fun, and I knew all along that that's what I wanted to do.

JEAN-MARC: *Do you feel that the techniques of illustration and comics overlap?*

JEAN GIRAUD: Not really. The rules that govern the field of illustrative work don't generally work in comics. In fact, they can interfere with your work. If a comic-book artist wants to use things he's learned from illustrative work, he'd better have a lot of experience. There's a whole translation process involved. Mind you, the reverse is true too. With a few exceptions, you can't do good illustrative work using comics techniques.

JEAN-MARC: *One of your first professional comics jobs was when you went work for Ijie, who was a famous Belgian comic artist, and the author of a western strip called JERRY SPRING. How much of an influence was he on your own work on LT. BLUEBERRY later?*

JEAN GIRAUD: Going to work for **Ijie** was really a rather classical move on my part: a young artist going to see an old

One-pager from Jean's "Blueberry, Mac Lure et Redneck" a portfolio piece.

"I believe the western is perceived as something exotic."

Above: Anger Face. Next page: Giraud's Indian portraits.

master whom he admired greatly. But in those days, it was rather unusual, at least for comics. Today, almost any pro sees dozens of young artists! So, **Jije** was actually pleased to find out that there was someone out there that not only knew his work, but admired him.

Working with **Jije** was great. I've learned a lot of things. He probably saved me a great deal of time in my growth as an artist. There are almost certainly things I learned from him that I would never have been able to learn by myself.

When I came back from my military service, he asked me to help him work on JERRY SPRING, which was already a famous series. **Jije** was very familiar with American techniques, like splitting pencilling and inking, etc. In those days, in Europe, except for **Herge,** comic-book artists did everything themselves. **Jije** was more open to using collaborators. So I did some work and inked THE ROAD TO CORONADO (1961).

Eventually, I left **Jije** because I felt that, in order to keep growing, I had to work on my own projects. But we remained very good friends, and he did some fill-in pages of an early LT. BLUEBERRY when I was late. (*Note:* Pages 17 to 38 of THE LOST RIDER.)

JEAN-MARC: *Why is there such a fascination for the American West in France — especially in comics?*

JEAN GIRAUD: I believe that the western is perceived as something extremely exotic, and that has not changed. Also, a western story takes place in a society with few rules, and in a framework where there is always more open, unexplored space ahead. This is something very powerful and appealing to a European, I believe.

In the field of comics, the publishers let the genre develop freely, without trying to force it to remain within a narrow range of cliches. So artists kept exploring it, but in different directions. Think of COMANCHE by **Hermann and Greg,** or the works of **Blanc-Dumont,** and many others.

As regards LT. BLUEBERRY, it happened very simply. One day, I went to PILOTE, which was just beginning, and I met **Jean-Michel Charlier,** who was one of the editors. He asked me what I wanted to do, and I said I liked westerns and science fiction. In those days, there wasn't much SF in comics, so he said we'd do a western. So that's how I started doing LT. BLUEBERRY.

JEAN-MARC: *Were you already interested in SF way back when, when you were doing LT. BLUEBERRY?*

JEAN GIRAUD: Of course. I discovered science fiction when I was young. My father gave me an issue of the French edition of F&SF when I was sixteen. I always liked SF. It is my inclination toward that kind of literature that eventually led me to do a series of SF illustrations for the French editions of works by authors I liked, such as **Poul Anderson, Isaac Asimov, A.E. Van Vogt, Robert Heinlein,** etc. Like most graphic artists, I was immediately drawn to science fiction and fantasy because it dealt with dreams, phantasms, the realms of imagination.

In fact, most people don't know that I was drawing as **"Moebius"** before I started LT. BLUEBERRY. I first used the **"Moebius"** signature when I started doing some short, funny strips, very much inspired by the early MAD stuff, for a French magazine called HARA-KIRI in early '63. Later, when I started doing SF illustrations for the French edition of GALAXY and others, which I did because I loved SF and I didn't want to do only westerns, I decided to reuse the name of **Moebius** to indicate a clear separation in my work between that, and **Gir's.**

JEAN-MARC: *Did you enjoy going from the western "Gir" to the SF "Moebius"?*

JEAN GIRAUD: It requires a certain gymnastics of the mind. If I did my SF work in the same style as my LT. BLUEBERRY work, that is, very realistic, using a brush, with lots of shadows, etc. it probably would be fairly easy. You

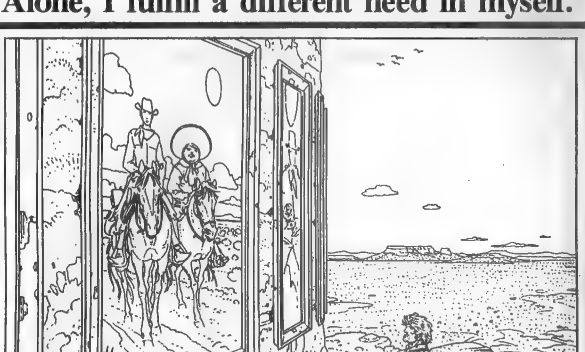
see, for me, the problem is not about going from one genre to another, it is really about going from one way of creating to another.

To a certain extent, I have developed a proficiency which enables me to do that relatively well. But I must always be careful, and keep certain controls in my mind. Otherwise, certain **Moebius** elements could easily infiltrate the LT. BLUEBERRY universe, and it would create contradiction or an unbalance that would ruin it. The closest I have come to using a realistic, **Gir**-like style in a science fiction story is with the INCAL saga.

JEAN-MARC: *Your work as Moebius has more of a spiritual side to it. Is it important for you to convey something more personal there rather than in the*

More of Jean "Moebius"/"Gir" Giraud's material from Lt. Blueberry.

"Alone, I fulfill a different need in myself."



Hommage to Jije — Blueberry looks at picture of Jerry Spring.

stories you draw for other writers, like Jean-Michel Charlier?

JEAN GIRAUD: I consider that the work I do with **Charlier** is as personal and as important to me as the work I do on my own. My relationships with these people are intensely personal relationships, and so are the strips we do together.

JEAN-MARC: *But do you prefer to work in collaboration with another writer, or fly yourself?*

JEAN GIRAUD: It's different. When I work alone, I fulfill a different need in myself. But I can't say I prefer it.

JEAN-MARC: *What are the visual influences in LT. BLUEBERRY?*

JEAN GIRAUD: First, any artist who draws westerns must learn to deal with all the archetypal imagery manufactured by Hollywood for half a century! You almost can't escape it. The only thing to do is, once in a while, look at some real-life period photographs to clear your mind, as it were. **Tardi** is able to do comics just based on period photos. Me, I've looked at too many comics and films. I can't do it!

As far as film influences are concerned, I'd mention **Peckinpah, Monte Hellman** and of course, **Sergio Leone.** Watching **Leone's** movies gave me a big visual shock, and totally impacted my own vision of the American West.

JEAN-MARC: *What do you think are your main strengths and weaknesses?*

JEAN GIRAUD: It's always very hard to analyze one's own strengths and weaknesses. . . I think I'm someone who is able to do a lot of things, in a lot of different styles, in an average sort of way. For all these different styles, you could find artists who are much better than I. For instance, there are better western artists than I, and there are better science fiction artists too. But I just happen to be able to do these two genres fairly well.

It's a bit like the "Tour de France", you know, the bicycle race? You can win the "Tour" without actually winning any individual competition. You just need to do very well on each of them, but not necessarily winning. It's like winning on points.

"The first time I saw CONAN was at the cast and crew

All artwork accompanying this interview is © 1989 William Stout, unless otherwise noted.

Stout's collaboration with Jim Henson resulted in a prehistoric film world of steaming swamps, lush primeval forests and hideously dreadful deserts (such as pictured here).

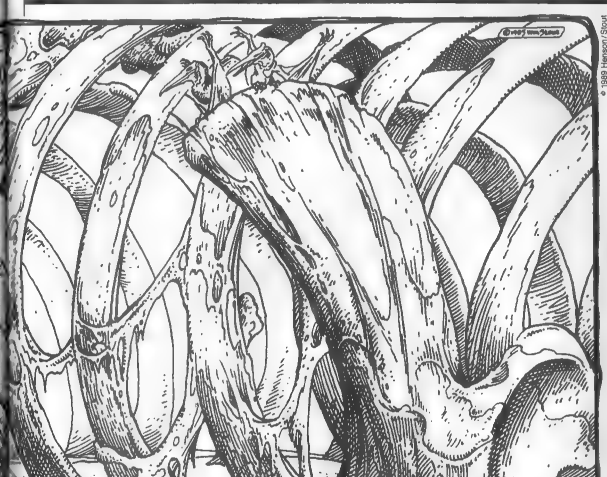
In part one, last issue, you met Bill Stout, man of a thousand artful professions, and comic-bookdom's numero uno *dinosaur fan. Now, you may have wondered just* what *he could do to top himself, after having worked with Russ Manning, Harvey Kurtzman and Will Elder, and so on. Well, wonder no more, the answer awaits, because Bill certainly has managed to keep busy . . .*

LAMAR WALDRON: *When you were working on the second CONAN, were you influenced by the first CONAN?*

BILL STOUT: Of course. You know, it's interesting. The first time I saw CONAN THE BARBARIAN was at the cast and crew screening. I was dazzled — it was the first time I'd seen my work on the big screen! But the second time was in a pit of a local Hollywood theatre, and I felt the film really *dragged*, it seemed dreadfully slow. When I started working on the second CONAN I thought, "Well, I should see the first one again and sort of refresh my memory," so I bought the videotape. Well, it seemed even worse on

Wm. STOUT

screening. I was dazzled — my work on the screen."



THE DESERT TREK #2

NHP 005-1105-102

TV. Without the wide screen I was focusing on *just* the acting, mostly, and I was missing a lot of the production design. It was excruciating! *(Laughter.)*

So then I went down to Mexico and began work on the second CONAN film, and they had a screening of the first one down there. The costume designer and I — the same costume designer who had worked on the first one, **John Bloomfield** — we were *slaggin'* the first film to each other, saying it was a terrible film, boring and slow and just awful, and we weren't even sure we were going to go to the screening. But we eventually decided to go see it. About a quarter of the way through the film tears were streaming from my eyes. The film just hit me like a ton of bricks. I'm crying all of the way through the rest of this poetic, romantic film, and I notice everyone else in the theater is crying, too. They've all got the handkerchiefs out, and it's just wiping us out. The film ends, the lights go on, and I go up the aisle to the costume designer, who is this rather staid Englishman, and the tears were streaming down his face! We looked at each other and simultaneously said, "It's a *fucking classic!" (Laughter.)* A lot of **Millus's** films have that effect. The first time I saw APOCALYPSE NOW I was not very affected by it, but the second time it was like being hit by a train.

LAMAR: *That's interesting, I'll have to give CONAN a rewatch, in a theater.* (Laughter.) *That's the hard part.*

BILL: Call the theater and have them run it. Well, actually, I've got it on disk and I had a good time the last time I watched it. It doesn't have . . . there's something about the big screen that just gets you more involved in the story.

LAMAR: *Maybe on a large-screen TV.*

BILL: One of the problems, I think, is that the film's sound was recorded very poorly. John wrote absolutely exquisite to-die-for romantic dialogue for that film, and a lot of that gets lost. I think it was the fourth time when I could really concentrate on the dialogue that it really became clear to me. I remember crying when I read that original screenplay, thinking that this is a most powerful

"Sword-and-sorcery as R.E.H. saw it had never been

vision of Conan, this *wonderful* romantic stuff.

LAMAR: *But something about the first viewing just doesn't bring that across, it takes a couple of viewings.*

BILL: I think it's the poor sound.

SUSAN BARROWS: *Sort of the Barry Smith approach to CONAN —*

BILL: Not visually but perceptually.

SUSAN: *Yeah, the noble barbarian.*

BILL: There's a great line in there when Valeria's dying, she says, "Let me breathe my last breath into your mouth." That's *so* poetic. The last breath, breathed in a kiss — what could be more romantic?

LAMAR: *Of course that wouldn't be true if it wasn't — I don't know, maybe all of our expectations, with Arnold Schwarzenegger, maybe until you get over those expectations, you can't really appreciate something like this dialogue.*

BILL: Well, at the time it was released, though, Arnold had only done PUMPING IRON, and he had a small part in a **Sally Field** film . . .

SUSAN: *STAY HUNGRY.*

BILL: So I don't think there was a lot of expectation of people seeing an Arnold film the way there is now. I think they went to see CONAN *and* Arnold.

LAMAR: *For me, though, I think I was seeing Arnold.*

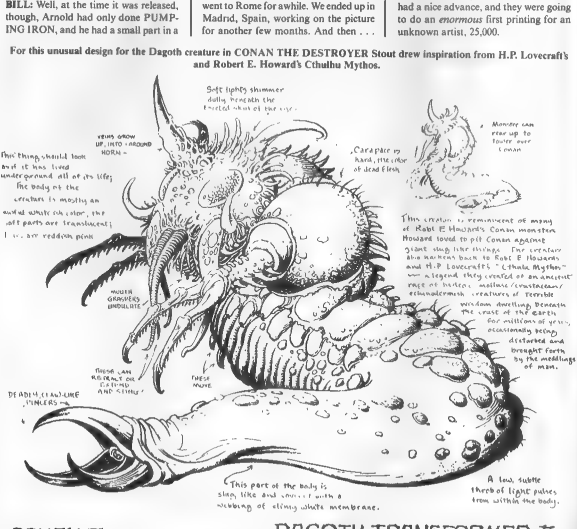
SUSAN: *You thought he was a hamhock.*

LAMAR: *Yeah.* (Laughter.) *But like you said, it would be interesting to give it a re-view. I know you left CONAN before you were all finished. Why was that?*

BILL: Well, for a year I was here working on CONAN, and then the production moved to Europe and I spent a couple of months in Zagreb, Yugoslavia, living there and working on the picture. I met this great Italian crew that **Dino DeLaurentis** had put together, and then I went to Rome for awhile. We ended up in Madrid, Spain, working on the picture for another few months. And then . . . Well, I have to back up, **Byron Preiss** had been visiting me here in Los Angeles — we had done some projects before, one of which was the **Harlan Ellison** story — and he asked, sort of conversationally, I thought, "If you could do a book on anything, what would you do?" I said, "Gee, I don't know."

This was around the beginning of my work on CONAN and I had just done a whole series of dinosaur pictures for **Don Glut's** revised DINOSAUR DICTIONARY. They were at the studio, and Byron said, "Would you like to do one on dinosaurs?" I said, "Yeah, sure, that would be great." — never giving it a second thought. A couple of months later Byron calls up and says, "Well, we got our book deal." *(Laughter.)* I said, "*What* book deal?" And he said Bantam wanted to do my dinosaur book and I had a nice advance, and they were going to do an *enormous* first printing for an unknown artist, 25,000.

For this unusual design for the Dagoth creature in CONAN THE DESTROYER Stout drew inspiration from H.P. Lovecraft's and Robert E. Howard's Cthulhu Mythos.


Soft lights shimmer dully beneath the frosted skin of the eye.
VEINS GROW UP INTO AROUND HORN
This thing should look as if it has lived underground all of its life; the body of the creature is mostly an awful white colour, the soft parts are translucent; i.e., are reddish pink.
Carapace of hard, ridged or of dead flesh
Monster can rear up to tower over Conan
This creature is reminiscent of many of Robt E Howard's Conan monsters Howard loved to pit Conan against giant slug like things. The creatures also harken back to Robt E Howards and H.P. Lovecraft's "Cthulu Mythos" — a legend, they created of an ancient race of hideous, mollusc/crustacean/elasmobranch creatures of terrible wisdom dwelling beneath the crust of the earth for millions of years occasionally being disturbed and brought forth by the meddlings of man.
MOUTH GRABBERS TENTACLES
MAJOR LIMB MASS OF CILIATED AND STINGY
THESE MORE
DEADLY CRUSHING PINCERS
This part of the body is slimy, like and snail's with a webbing of slimy white membrane.
A few, subtle shards of light pulses from within the body.
CONAN II
DAGOTH TRANSFORMED II

© DeLaurentiis

done on film before . . . new ground to be broken."

I foolishly thought I could do both THE DINOSAURS and the CONAN picture at the same time. I *quickly* found out once I was in Europe that that was almost impossible. I did do almost all of the preliminary sketches for all of the paintings for the book in Spain, and at *that* point, as we began construction on the film, I had to decide whether I was going to continue with the film or do the book. And I decided to do THE DINOSAURS. So I left the film and travelled all throughout Europe collecting research and information, and then came back to Los Angeles. So that's how *that* came about, and that's how and why I left CONAN.

LAMAR: *Was it an amicable parting?*

BILL: Ron knew how important the book was to me, and so he was a little bit torn in that he sure could have used my help — no one else knew what the film should look like, it was basically just him and me in the art department who had a clear vision of what it was supposed to look like. It was certainly a different film than any of the Europeans had dealt with before. They would say, "Is it like a HERCULES movie?" *(Laughter.)* "Is it a gladiator film? Is it knights in armor?" "No, it's bits of those but really something that hasn't been done yet." Which, of course, was true — no one had done a proper sword-and-sorcery genre film yet, it was up to us to define the genre. The sword-and-sorcery genre as **Robert E. Howard** saw it had never been done on film before. It was *similar* to Vikings, similar in some ways to gladiators, and it had some fantasy aspects, some ARABIAN NIGHTS type stuff, but *none* of that was really dead-on CONAN. **Howard** *took* from all those genres and really created his own genre. That was one of the things that *excited* me about the film, that here was new ground to be broken.

So anyway, Ron was kind enough to let me go. Bless him, he was more a friend than a boss. I travelled around Europe gathering research for the book in Germany, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, France, and England. Then I returned to L.A. As I began doing the dinosaur pictures and sending them back to New York, Bantam kept enthusiastically upping the print run, 25,000 to 50,000 to 100,000 to 150,000, and we ultimately ended up with a 250,000 first printing. It went from being a minor art book to their big gift book of the year.

SUSAN: *Did you visit the museums in Europe while you were there?*

BILL: Absolutely, I hit every natural history museum I could find. I tried to meet **Zdenek Burian** in Czechoslovakia, one of the great dinosaur artists of all time, but he was on vacation. I did get to see a stack of about 40 new paintings that he had done, though — which to this day have still not been printed.

LAMAR: *Yeah, I'm familiar with him as an Edgar Rice Burroughs illustrator; he did one of the TARZAN books, and I think I saw some stuff once he had done with dinosaurs.*

"I didn't want to just design ordinary ONE MILLION B.C. costumes for the cavemen in CONAN THE DESTROYER," explained Stout, "so I advanced their culture a little and with some decorative ideas made them a little less boring than your typical movie caveman."

BILL: Yeah, he's done a whole series of *fabulous* huge large oversized volumes, full-color paintings of dinosaurs.

LAMAR: *Are they available in America?*

BILL: They were. I picked them up at Pickwick Books when I was in high school. They collected a lot of the dinosaur paintings into a book that American Heritage printed, I believe, and then there was a second book, a sort of companion volume, printed by a dif-

"I tried to meet Zdenek Burian . . . the great dinosaur artist."

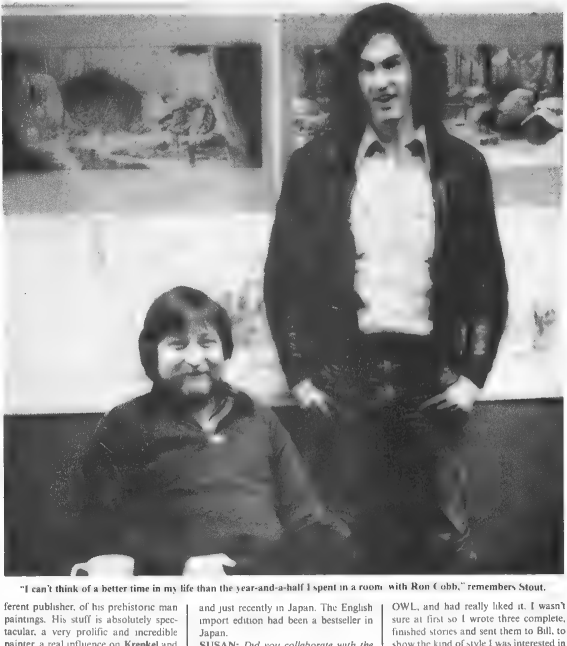


Photo: Carl Macek

"I can't think of a better time in my life than the year-and-a-half I spent in a room with Ron Cobb," remembers Stout.

ferent publisher, of his prehistoric man paintings. His stuff is absolutely spectacular, a very prolific and incredible painter, a real influence on **Krenkel** and **Frazetta.**

LAMAR: *This'll give all of the readers something to hunt for. I'm glad you mentioned the print run on THE DINOSAURS, because I was wondering how well it had done. Now it's a hard book to come by.*

BILL: Bantam decided to let it go out of print and the rights have reverted back to us. Now a different arm of Bantam is going to reprint it in 1989. It was also printed in Italy and France and Germany and just recently in Japan. The English import edition had been a bestseller in Japan.

SUSAN: *Did you collaborate with the writer on this?*

BILL: Yes. The way that would work was I would come up with a preliminary sketch and then I would write like a little synopsis, a plot summary of what was going on in the picture, and then send that to the writer, **William Service,** and he would flesh out the stories.

LAMAR: *Had you known Service before?*

BILL: No. Byron found him. Byron had read a book that he had written called OWL, and had really liked it. I wasn't sure at first so I wrote three complete, finished stories and sent them to Bill, to show the kind of style I was interested in having, and then sent him some pictures and synopses. He then wrote some stories which were just fabulous. Eventually, I ended up doing some illustrations around his stories as well. And Byron had a tremendous amount of good input.

LAMAR: *It sounds like you were totally happy with how it came out.*

BILL: Yeah, absolutely

LAMAR: *When there is another edition*

BILL: There'll be an enormous tempta-

Burian: "His stuff is spectacular, an influence on Frazetta."

tion to update it. *(Laughter.)*

LAMAR: *That's what I was going to ask. Would it need to be updated?*

BILL: It was absolutely up to date at the time it was published, but there has been such an information *explosion* — I mean the book was published in the *middle* of an information explosion on dinosaurs, and little did I know that the momentum would *continue!* At the time I did the book everything we knew about dinosaurs was just sort of turned upside down. Since then *most* of that has stayed the same, but they have still discovered much more information about them. There were creatures that they thought were meat eaters that they now consider plant eaters, there were just all kinds of amazing things discovered. Now they think the Brontosaurus *didn't* come from eggs, that they were products of live birth. So all of that *new* information —

LAMAR: *What would you do, Bill, would you revise it or go with it like it was?*

SUSAN: *THE DINOSAURS II?*

BILL: It depends on what I was involved in at the time, and if the publisher is willing to . .

LAMAR: *Underwrite the cost*

BILL: Exactly.

LAMAR: *Well again . . . it's ironic because I'm sure that book and your other efforts in the dinosaur field have helped to fuel all of this information explosion, in just keeping people aware of dinosaurs and keeping that interest up*

BILL: One of the reasons for doing the book was that I was part of a group called the Dinosaur Society of Los Angeles. We have monthly and bi-monthly meetings in which we would be filled in paleontologists about all of the exciting new discoveries that were happening in the field, and there was no one book that had collected *all* of this information. That's what I was attempting to do in THE DINOSAURS.

LAMAR: *Is the Dinosaur Society still active?*

SUSAN: *They're not* extinct, *are they?* (Laughter.)

BILL: Not very active for awhile. It seems to be getting back to full swing, though, as of late. The main organizer of the group, **Sylvia Czerkas,** went on a series of digs that took her and her husband, **Stephen Czerkas,** away from the group, took their time away, for about two years, so there haven't been regular meetings. Now they've come back here and they've opened up a studio in Pasadena where they're making life-size dinosaurs, so we've reformed the group and have started having regular meetings once again. Another nice side benefit of THE DINOSAURS, for me anyway, was that LIFE MAGAZINE did a big five-page full-color article on it.

LAMAR: *With artwork from the book?*

BILL: Yes, it's the issue with **Mick Jagger** on the cover. *(Laughter.)*

SUSAN: *Where are the originals?*

BILL: I've got most of them here. There's twelve that are in a show that's going around the country.

LAMAR: *Is it a dinosaur exhibition?*

BILL: It's a show of dinosaur art from the turn of the century to the present. I've got twelve pieces in that. And now the English and the French are interested in the show, and Japan also. **Sylvia Czerkas** put it together. I've also got 30 pieces touring in another show in Japan right

Every morning on CONAN THE BARBARIAN Stout would do sketches like these as warm-up exercises.

"I've done production paintings, the CONAN paint-

now. These are some of the movie art pieces that I've done; production paintings, the CONAN paintings, the RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD stuff. They're heavily into monster movies in Japan.

LAMAR: *That doesn't surprise me too much.*

SUSAN: (Looking at a dinosaur painting.) *I don't think I've ever seen a Tyrannosaurus like that one before.*

BILL: It's a Spinosaurus, it's sort of a Tyrannosaurus Rex with a finback that they discovered in the Sahara Desert. I repainted that one. I didn't actually repaint it, but I painted more into it and it's a much better painting now. They used that for a video boxcover for a video called MORE DINOSAURS.

LAMAR: *What do you think about all of the relatively recent dinosaur theories, about warm-bloodedness, real quick on their feet, closely related to the birds, things like that?*

BILL: As I said, one of the reasons I did the book was because there was so much new material about dinosaurs that was not getting to the public, or that was only getting to the public in drips and drabs. I wanted to do a book that had *everything* all together. There had been this *explosion* of dinosaur knowledge, a renaissance, including the fact that more species of dinosaurs have been discovered in the last few years than in the entire history of paleontology. Here was a chance to do some dinosaurs that had never been done, and to re-evaluate our old favorites like Triceratops and Tyrannosaurus Rex as to what their lives were like. You know, we had discovered that they weren't slow, they could move very fast, they weren't stupid, they travelled in herds, they took care of their young. It takes an incredible amount of animal intelligence to nest in large groups, build nesting circles, look after your young for several years — far more intelligence than we had ever given the dinosaurs credit for. So here was a chance to put *all* of that into one book.

The main thing I got criticized for by paleontologists was that I didn't make the dinosaurs colorful enough. They wanted to see dinosaurs in rainbow colors, with polka dots, stripes, lots of stuff like that. I did that in a couple of illustrations just to please them, but I consciously veered away from that because I thought I was presenting so much new material here that if I was to do that then the book would just be dismissed as out-and-out fantasy.

LAMAR: *That is ironic, but you're right, a lot of people would have looked at it and said, "Ah, dinosaurs didn't look like that."*

BILL: Yeah.

SUSAN: (*Looking at another painting.*) *Oh, flamingos!*

BILL: Yes, that was a paleontologist's favorite picture because I put the zebra stripes on the corythosaurs. That's called "Warm Weather."

LAMAR: *Were flamingos around during the dinosaur days?*

SUSAN: *Isn't there fossil evidence that they coexisted, along with redheaded woodpeckers?*

BILL: I got all of this information from **Robert Long**, the Berkeley paleontologist who's now associated with the Petrified Forest, and . . . the experts go back and forth. I spent a week in Washington D.C. at the Smithsonian doing research for some more dinosaur paintings, and one guy there said, "No, they didn't have those birds." I said, "But **Rob Long** says — " "Yeah, I know there's this guy I know, too, who thinks he's found ducks and flamingos, but in *my* opinion, no, they weren't." *(Laughter.)* So there's still a controversy being battled back and forth.

LAMAR: *I have to say, though, that you're certainly an extremely knowledgeable artist. You can tell that there's a lot of thought and work that goes into each drawing, even beyond the lines that are on the paper and things like that.*

BILL: That was another thing I wanted to do with THE DINOSAURS. I didn't want to have any just . . . well, so many dinosaur books are just filled with portraits of dinosaurs. I made a promise to myself that every picture in the book had to have something extra, had to have an extra *idea*, there had to be some kind of thought behind it other than *just* showing the dinosaur. Like the picture "Tallest," this is a Barhosaurus and he's encountering two supersaurus — well, since they hadn't found the supersaurus

The first "principal corpse" designed by Stout for RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD (Stout's first film as Production Designer) was the Tarman.

ings, the RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD stuff."

skull yet, I couldn't draw their heads with any sort of accuracy, so I cropped the picture in such a way so that you don't see their heads. But it's *still* an indication of their size. If you know how bit the Brachiosaurus is then you can tell how big these guys are.

SUSAN: *It's great that the big lizards are getting popular again. Has THE DINOSAURS gotten a lot of interest outside of dinosaur buffs?*

BILL: Oh, let me tell you a story. A few years ago **Jim Henson** was spending Christmas with his daughter Lisa in the Bahamas. Lisa's a big dinosaur fan, so she was trying to convince her father to do a dinosaur movie. They were poring over all of these different dinosaur books and their cook came up to them and said, "Well, these books ain't nothin', *I've* got the *real* dinosaur book." *(Laughter.)* And she went back and she brought them a copy of *my* book and laid it on them, and they spent the whole rest of the day looking through my book. And Jim told his daughter, "Contact this guy when you get back to Los Angeles, see if he would like to design a dinosaur movie." And sure enough she did. **Lisa Henson** was a producer at Warner Brothers.

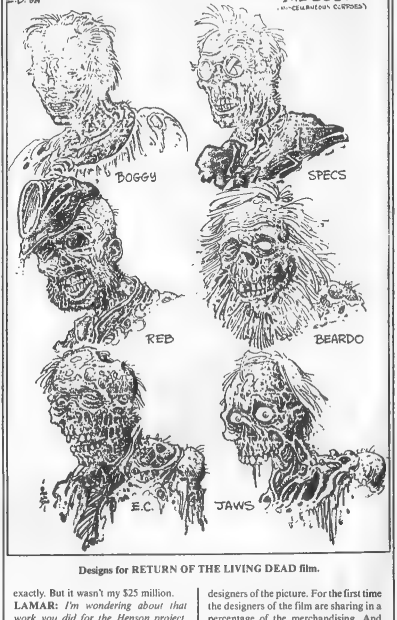
She called me up and we got together with **Jim Henson** and we decided it would be great to make a dinosaur movie, and then at the next meeting I somehow convinced them that I should be the guy to write it as well. **Lucy Fisher** committed $25 million from Warner Brothers to do this film. It was to be like DARK CRYSTAL but with dinosaurs, and I was going to make it as authentic but also as entertaining as possible. I wrote it almost like a **Walt Disney** true-life adventure. And I wrote it so that it could be shot two different ways, so that you could understand the story visually, completely, without any dialogue, and I wrote a dialogue version, too. They loved the script. I did six months worth of design work on the film, and they loved the dinosaurs. Then they found out that **Spielberg** was doing a dinosaur project and they dropped it. *(Gasps and groans.)*

LAMAR: *Jesus.*

BILL: So it's dead in the water, as they say. **Spielberg's** is an animated feature, and they will have it out a year ahead of when we would have had ours out.

LAMAR: *You have to question the wisdom of that decision, because if Spielberg's film is a hit then you guys would have something in the theaters before anybody could rush any kind of sequel into production.*

BILL: That's what I said, my sentiments



Designs for RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD film.

exactly. But it wasn't my $25 million.

LAMAR: *I'm wondering about that work you did for the Henson project, might that not find its way into a book at some point, or does Hollywood not work that way?*

BILL: I retained the book rights for the art. Negotiating is a sort of fun but important hobby of mine. Besides using it to champion the rights of comic artists I also try to improve the lot of all of us production designers and production artists. One of the things I was proudest of on MASTERS had nothing to do with the look of the film, it had to do with the deal we negotiated on behalf of the designers of the picture. For the first time the designers of the film are sharing in a percentage of the merchandising. And also for the first time the designers are sharing in the profit participation of the film.

LAMAR: *Whoa!*

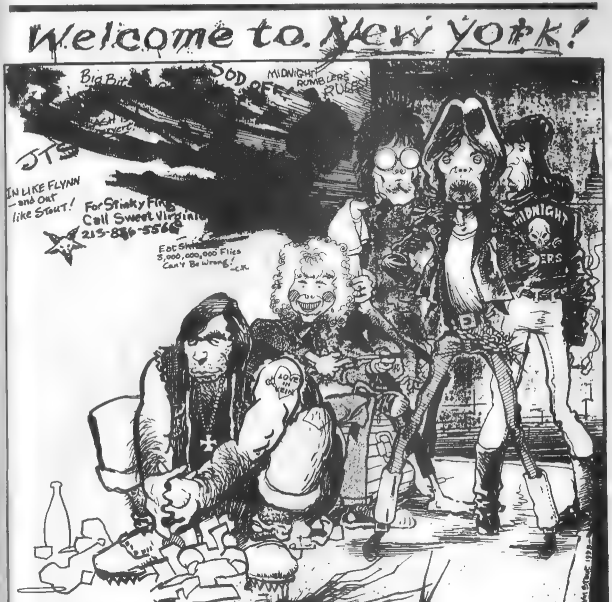
BILL: This is just . . . it's fair. I mean we in essence designed Mattel's new toy line so we *should* get compensated somehow . . . share in the profits.

LAMAR: *Was the deal lived up to?*

BILL: Do you mean, did we see any money? Not really — but that wasn't the point. The important thing was to set the precedent so that on future films those

ATTACK ON CHEDRANIA is a proposed film project spearheaded by Richard Elfman, director of that great midnight movie FORBIDDEN ZONE, and brother of Oingo Boingo's Danny Elfman.

"Jack Kirby should have an enormous pension fund."



Stout meets Steadman on this 1973 Rolling Stones bootleg album cover.

things will be easier to get. A producer hates to be the first guy to give talent any new ground, but he doesn't mind so much being the second.

LAMAR: *I think that's great. I remember years ago when Neal Adams was trying to form his guild and he was talking about royalties and $100 or $200 a page, you know, and the companies said they would never pay royalties, no one would ever get $200 a page. Well, you know, that certainly happens — not a lot, but it does happen.*

BILL: Yeah.

LAMAR: *It still irks me to see these guys like Kirby and Williamson, who have done all of this great work, getting nothing at all.*

BILL: Yeah, no benefits. I mean if those guys get hurt or get sick or something, they've got nothing to fall back on as far as medical benefits or anything, and that's criminal. It's really criminal that they have been treated this way after their work has supported these companies and made these companies prosper.

LAMAR: *Well, what do you think should be done at this point, or do you think there is anything that can be done for the old-timers?*

BILL: What I think and this is not going to happen, obviously — but I think the proper thing to do, the honest and honorable thing to do, with Marvel and DC, would be to sort of make a fund to, for one thing, provide health benefits for all of the people that have done the creative work for the companies. Especially **Jack Kirby,** for God's sake! There is no reason on earth that that man should not have an enormous pension fund. He

"MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE came along — they

should be freed of any financial problems that he might incur medically, he should not have that financial burden. I mean . . . God, the merchandising off of his characters alone, the film rights and stuff, it's . . . *(Gestures with hands.)*

LAMAR: *A mind-boggler.*

BILL: The man's a living treasure! It's astonishing that the companies are getting away with it. It's astonishing that they have sunk so low as human beings to allow this to happen. It's horrible.

LAMAR: *Yeah. Well, we can all do what we can and lend moral support, and maybe we can effect some changes some day. We're both working for independent publishers who treat their people nicely. I guess I kind of hope that maybe the Frank Millers and the John Byrnes might eventually decide to go that route, too. Do you think you'll ever get your hand back into the comics field?*

BILL: *Ha,* I'm doing something right now!

LAMAR: *Oh, even as we speak?*

BILL: Yeah, some covers.

LAMAR: *I guess I was thinking in terms of storytelling.*

BILL: Oh, storytelling?

LAMAR: *Or has the field not managed to catch up yet as far as the pay scales and the time and everything like that?*

BILL: *(Laughs.)* The pay scale is so *far* behind — I mean even the stuff that I'm doing right now, even the paperback covers, I couldn't possibly do those for the money.

LAMAR: *They're more for fun right now.*

BILL: They're *just* for fun. If I have a few weeks of spare time or something, or I know I can squeeze some days in, then I'll do a comics job, like a cover or something. Though actually, I've been doing more comics lately than ever. I just can't get comics out of my blood!

LAMAR: *Let's jump back now and talk about MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE*

The very first thing Stout painted when he began work on MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE was this design for Beastman.

BILL: In early '85 I decided to do what **Ron Cobb** was doing, and that was stop being a production designer and just do freelance bits, just design a monster for this movie here, maybe a machine or something for this movie there. I was real happy just doing that, working on a whole variety of pictures — fun work, lotsa dough, and no responsibility.

SUSAN: *Damn good reasons.*

BILL: Yeah. MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE came along — they asked me to be the production designer on the picture for four years straight, every January, and every January I made a list of all of the projects that I wanted to do, and MASTERS usually ended up on the bottom of the list. I kept thinking of those characters with names like Stinkor and He-Man. I thought it would be a real uphill battle, I thought it would be nearly impossible to make a picture that people would take seriously. Then the director called me and asked me to come in and do three weeks of concept art on the film. That was **Gary Goddard**. After talking to Gary, I realized he had a handle on *just* how to pull it off. Then I read the script by **David Odell,** it was a wonderful script, and I thought, "This sounds great, I'll do my three weeks."

So I worked for three weeks, mostly doing costume design, and then the three weeks turned into four, the four turned into six. There was not a tremendous amount of work by the production designer that the director was happy with, and then the six became eight. Then the director and the production designer and the producer went to Iceland to scout locations, and on the plane back the production designer announced to the director that he thought it would be better if he left the project. This was two months before shooting was to begin — with no sets designed, at that time, on a $15 million effects film!

SUSAN: *Eek!*

BILL: The production designer recommended me to become the production designer. When they got back that was the director's first question to me, "Would you production-design this film?" I thought about it, I thought, "God, usually on a film like this you have one to two years prep time before you start shooting, and I've got two months and the only thing that's been approved so far has been my costume designs. If I can pull *this* off, I can do just about anything!" *(Laughter.)*

SUSAN: *Just crazy enough to work.*

BILL: And if I can't pull it off, who could *blame* me! *(Laughter.)*

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asked me to be production designer for four years straight."

LAMAR: *It's a no-lose situation.*

BILL: Yeah. If I didn't pull it off there's the old, "Well, what did you *expect*, who *could* do it!" *(Laughter.)* So I took it on. Immediately the weight of the production was on my shoulders, and I began to *really* just . . . I went from a regular 40-hour-a-week job to seven days a week, 18 hours a day, and started cranking out designs. The first thing I did was I hired **Moebius**, and then I hired a terrific storyboard artist, **George Jensen**, one of the all time great guys, and we just started cranking. I already had designers **Ed Eyth** and **Joe Griffith**. The production helped us out with the way they planned around our designing and building. They would shoot on one set while we would be building another set, and we would finish with that set and they would move over and film and we would start building another set. We had this sort of design overlap going all through the film where I was designing things up until the very last week of shooting.

LAMAR: *It was coordinated out.*

BILL: Down to the wire.

SUSAN: *How long did you spend on it overall?*

BILL: I spent ten months on the picture.

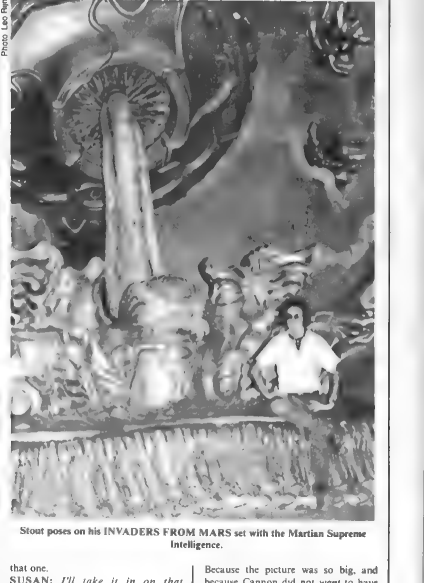
SUSAN: *That's a long three weeks.* (Laughter.) *How do you feel about the final result?*

BILL: I am really happy with it. Cannon Films did not have a cast and crew screening, to punish the production for going over budget and over the shooting schedule. The art department, however, did not go over budget, we came in for about half of our original budget. Our department was never late and saved them over a million dollars. They still wouldn't let *us* have a cast and crew screening, though — the whole production ended up going ten million over budget. There was a lot of what I thought was essential stuff that didn't get shot, I kept wondering how the heck are they going to put a picture together. Fortunately we had one of the world's great editors, **Anne Coates**, who was the editor on LAWRENCE OF ARABIA, BECKET, GREYSTOKE, ELEPHANT MAN.

LAMAR: *A few other decent films.*

BILL: Yeah. She did an amazing job. My wife and my oldest son and I went to opening night at the Egyptian Theater in Hollywood, and I was prepared for the worst, and I ended up seeing a wonderful film. I was really pleased with the way it came out. It goes to show — you just never can tell. I still get compliments on that one.

Photo: Leo Pen



Stout poses on his INVADERS FROM MARS set with the Martian Supreme Intelligence.

SUSAN: *I'll take it in on that recommendation.*

LAMAR: *How did they do conveying your designs into actuality?*

BILL: Boy, it's all over the place. *(Laughter.)* That was part of my job as production designer, to make *sure* that my designs come out looking *exactly* the way they should look. That takes an enormous amount of time. Once I actually became production designer, I had so much supervisory activity in my schedule that I really didn't have too much time to draw, so I did almost all of my designing on Saturdays and Sundays when no one was at the studio. I would spend entire weekends designing the picture, and then during the week . . . Because the picture was so big, and because Cannon did not *want* to have *one* house do everything, they had us farm out all of the different pieces of the design work and the building and everything all over town, which *meant* that *I* had to go all over town to check things — so that took all of my time during the week.

LAMAR: *That sounds like an enormous amount of work, but then if it produces a good film, it must be worth it to you.*

BILL: Yes. It's like **John Milius** kept reminding **Arnold Schwarzenegger** during the making of CONAN, "The pain is temporary, the film is forever."

LAMAR: *One project I want to get to is your GODZILLA project which was never made. How did that come about,*

"I did a wide-screen color painting of Godzilla attacking

your involvement with . . . I forget, what was the title?

BILL: The film originally was GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS IN 3-D. The basic premise was to do a GODZILLA movie unlike the Japanese movie, instead, take what was a basic good idea and give it a state of the art special effects treatment. We were going to hire **Rick Baker** to do some of the heads, mechanical heads. We were going to hire **Dave Allen** to do stop-motion animation. It was going to be a *complete* sort of Spielbergian production of GODZILLA, which really appealed to me. Too often nowadays people decide to remake classics, and it's an uphill battle all of the way because just *announcing* that you're remaking a classic passes a huge percentage of the population off. You're constantly being compared to the original because of people's fondness for it 'and if it's a classic it's a classic for usually some sort of good or magical reason. It's very difficult to come up with a great film intentionally, a lot of times it's just a matter of luck and the right combination of people and that magic something happens and you end up with a classic. It's very tough to pull off and completely unpredictable

But the idea of taking a film that was just okay but that had a neat idea, redoing *that, really* redoing it, I thought that was so much smarter than trying to remake a classic. The original GODZILLA film is not a great film, it's an okay film, very slow and crude but it does have some neat stuff in it. So here was a neat opportunity, I thought, to do something really hot. The script was really good, it was written by **Fred Dekker** whose movie THE MONSTER SQUAD recently came out, and the producer-director was **Steve Miner.** At that time Steve's most prominent works were the first three FRIDAY THE 13TH movies, he was the producer of the first, the producer-director of the second, and the director of the third — and the third was in 3-D, so he was familiar with the 3-D process.

So . . . Shame on me, but I forget who recommended me, but Steve called me up to do a presentation painting for the project. A presentation painting is usually sort of a fake movie poster that you show when you pitch the project to studios, so they have a visual idea what you're talking about, because most producers don't read. *(Laughter.)* I didn't say *"can't"!* So I did a *big* wide-screen color painting of Godzilla attacking the Golden Gate Bridge, since the picture took place in San Francisco, and had all sorts of 3-D elements in it with things popping out of the frame, like helicopters and bridge cables and all sorts of stuff. Steve asked me if I knew anyone who did storyboards. I told him that I did storyboards, and so he hired me to start doing the storyboards for the special effects of the film.

Sort of midway through that I got the bright idea — actually I didn't *get* the idea, it was implanted in me by the great storyboard artist **Mentor Huebner** he said, "You know, when you're just working with the director from the script and you're storyboarding, you're really the production designer. You are really designing the way everything's going to be shot, designing what is going to be in the sets, you're deciding the set dressing and everything else." So he put that bee in my bonnet, I thought, "Yeah, I could be the production designer of this film, *yeah!" (Laughter.)* So I approached Steve, he thought it over, and he was open to the idea, much to my gratitude and his credit. So I began to think of myself as the production designer of the film, and worked on the film for about nine months

Steve was going through a situation that is very typical in Hollywood He would take the project to a studio, everyone would love it, it would go higher and higher up in the chain of command at the studio, everyone would love it, and when it would get to the last guy, the only guy with the *real* authority to make it a "go" project, the answer would be "No." So, he'd have to start all over again

LAMAR: *Who was funding it?*

BILL: Steven was funding it out of his own pocket from the money he made from the FRIDAY THE 13TH movies That was another big problem, they would say, "Sure, you can do a FRIDAY THE 13TH slasher pic, but what makes you think you could do a science fiction film?"

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Stout's association with Mattel began much earlier than "Masters of the Universe". In the middle '70s Stout produced the comic style art for the "Big Jim" toy packaging.

the Golden Gate Bridge — all sorts of 3-D elements in it."

GODZILLA® & © 1969 Toho Co. Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

Besides doing production design paintings for the proposed American GODZILLA film, Stout storyboarded the entire film. To assist him with this massive undertaking, he hired comic artist friends Dave Stevens and Doug Wildey.

LAMAR: *Horror and science fiction have nothing in common.*

SUSAN: *GOREZILLA.*

BILL: Yeah. Steve tried to convince them. He said, "Look — The last two films I directed grossed over 80 million dollars, doesn't that say *anything* to you?"

LAMAR: *Apparently not. What eventually happened?*

BILL: There was sort of a lag period and in that lag period I was offered RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD by **Dan O'Bannon**, offered it as production designer. I thought, "Boy, here's a chance to production design a film; GODZILLA's sort of in limbo while Steve sort of regroups and sorts things out." So I did that picture. Upon finishing RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD, 20th Century Fox by that time was interested in GODZILLA and they kicked in all of the final money needed to finish the effects storyboards. Since there were effects in almost every shot, we had 95% of the film storyboarded. And the picture kept going on up the chain of command and the last guy again said "No." This was four years of Steve's life sort of down the tubes, and an enormous amount of his money. He had hired me and then I had hired **Dave Stevens** and **Doug Wildey** to do boards also.

LAMAR: *And so the project's just totally dead now?*

BILL: I hope not. I think Steve will revive it eventually, it's just too good to let go of for keeps, too good an idea. I think it would just completely blow people away for them to go to the movie theater expecting to see a crummy GODZILLA movie, and see this *incredible* effects extravaganza with a great story.

LAMAR: *I remember seeing an illustration you had done, and it didn't look like any Godzilla I've ever seen. You couldn't have done your version of Godzilla as a guy in a suit, he looked vicious.*

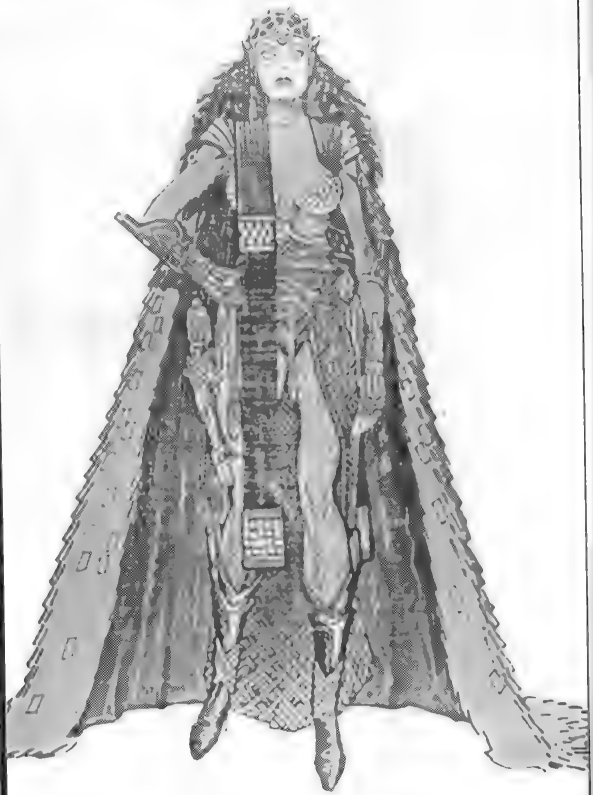
BILL: Yeah, he was vicious, and he was tender — he had a whole range of facial expressions. He moved like a reptilian creature — it was definitely not a guy in a suit.

LAMAR: *Well, we'll all be hoping it does come to fruition.*

BILL: Might as well, stranger things have happened in Hollywood. *(Laughter.)*

LAMAR: *Speaking of strange things, what was that DARK PLANET controversy all about?*

BILL: Oh, yeah. I had forgotten all about a screenplay that I had written, and sent out. I was talking to a friend who used to work for New World and I said, "How's old **Roger Corman** doing?" He said, "Oh, he's all right. He's doing a couple of sword-and-sorcery pictures down in Argentina." I said, "Oh, what are they called?" And he said, "Oh, *such-and-such* and KAIN OF DARK PLANET." I said, "*KAIN OF DARK PLANET!* I *wrote* that movie! Wait a minute, what's going on here? You wouldn't happen to have a screenplay or



Gloria Swanson's Norma Desmond character in Billy Wilder's SUNSET BOULEVARD provided that inspiration for Stout's revamp of Evil-Lyn.

"Like every guy & gal in this town, I want to be a director."

anything like that laying around here would you?" "Well, I just happen to have the screenplay right here." So I went, "Read the first page, what does it say?" He says, "KAIN OF DARK PLANET by **John Broderick.**" I said, "And . . .?" But there was no sound forthcoming. I immediately called my attorney and we made some changes. *(Laughter.)* And so now the film does indeed give credit where credit is due. I don't know if the video is corrected the way it should be. The new credit, if you see the film in a theater, reads "Story by **William Stout** and **John Broderick,** Screenplay by **William Stout** and **John Broderick.**" There is a credit on the video, but I think it's just a story credit, I'm not sure.

LAMAR: *How did the filmed version mesh with what you had written?*

BILL: Hey, for $300,000 it's not a bad picture. *(Laughter.)* There are some things I find very embarrassing. For one the director took out all of my really nice dialogue and replaced it with what I consider "working dialogue" — *that's* always a shock to hear. You know, this is somthing that *happens* to me — and it must happen to other people a lot — where you do your best work and people demand *less* from you. *Intentionally* they want something not as good, and to this day I fail to understand that. I kill myself on something, and then they just want to make it a lesser piece of work.

LAMAR: *That's hard to understand. I always attribute that to the untalented, marginally talented, or even just lesser talented people, who find themselves in a position of authority and, just to assert their authority or to give themselves some self confidence of self esteem, take something and fuck with it just to show they can do it.*

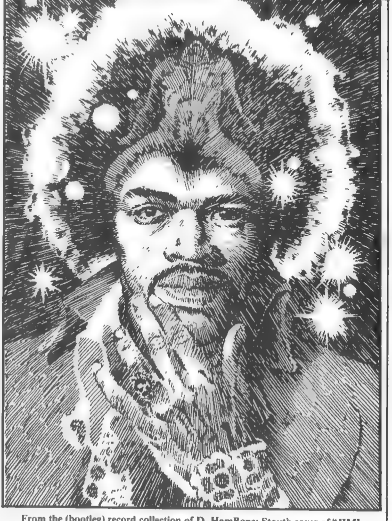
SUSAN: *And now it's got their fingerprint.*

LAMAR: *Yeah. It may not be as good, but it's got their fingerprint.*

BILL: Yes. That reminds me of a **Wally Wood** story — **Wally Wood** is in a subway and he looks out the window and sees this beautiful sort of **Alphonse Mucha** type poster, exquisite, gorgeous, and there's a little kid with a big marking pen, he's drawing a moustache on it. And Wally says, "That kid'll be an art director someday." *(Laughter.)* So anyway, we got that all straightened out legally so I got credit.

LAMAR: *What would you like to see on the horizon?*

BILL: Well, like every guy and gal in this town, and their pet dog, I want to be a director. *(Laughter.)* I'm writing screenplays to that effect and I've tried to maintain a good track record in films. And I do good work. On MASTERS I designed the biggest set that Laird Studios has seen in like the last 30 years — it took up their two biggest sound stages! That's the old R.K.O. Studios, where they shot KONG and CITIZEN KANE. You see, what comes around goes around. I just wish they still had Rosebud there. They still have the CITIZEN KANE props there, but they don't have Rosebud And they burned down the KONG gates for GONE WITH THE WIND.



From the (bootleg) record collection of D. HamBone: Stout's cover of "JIMI HENDRIX Good Karma 2."

LAMAR: *We were just taking some pictures today of the old R.K.O. globe, but it's not those studios, is it?*

BILL: No, it's the R.K.O. that was over next to M-G-M, or a couple of blocks from M-G-M. One of the great moments of my life was at the 50th anniversary of the KONG premiere — I don't know if you're aware of it but they recreated the original premiere of KING KONG, even had the giant Kong head. At the party afterwards I had **Fay Wray** sign my MAKING OF KING KONG book.

LAMAR: *That must have been a trip.*

SUSAN: *Did she scream for you? (Laughter.)*

BILL: When she was signing that book I didn't know what planet I was on, I didn't know what century this was. Time and space stopped at that moment. *(Laughter.)*

LAMAR: *So, we can hope to see a film directed by Bill Stout.*

BILL: Hopefully soon. I'm *really* looking forward to my directorial debut. I've written a sequel to RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD. This is not the sequel

"Dan O'Bannon & I have this secret plan which we'll announce

The first presentation painting for the GORDIAN 4 project began with this charcoal drawing.

that has already been made to RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD, this is a film that actually stands on its own. It uses the same *rules* that Dan set down in his original picture, about the behavior of the zombies, and also the quality of being something fresh and original, something you've never seen.

LAMAR: *Did you have anything to do with the other sequel with the other sequel to RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD?*

BILL: No. They asked me to be production designer, then I read the screenplay and was shocked to find that they had plagiarized entire sections out of the first film word for word.

LAMAR: *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD?*

BILL: Oh, no, RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD. So I turned down RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD PART II. And I had nothing to do with Romero's NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, that needs to be said.

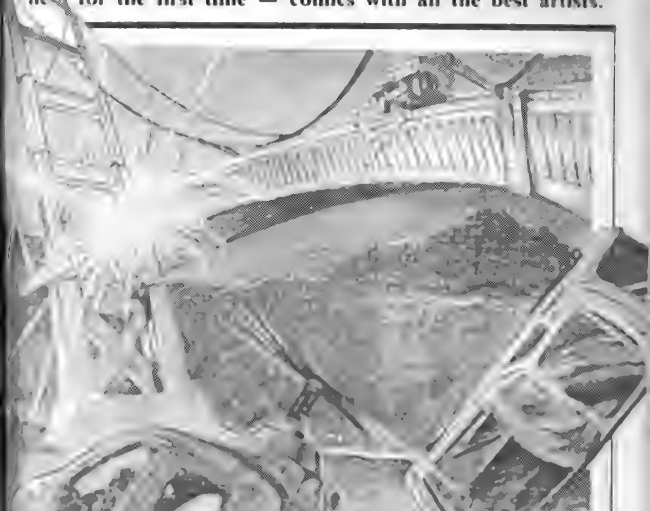
LAMAR: *It's confusing, discussing a sequel to a sequel with a sequel.*

BILL: Yeah. RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD was the "sequel" to NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, and mine is called SPAWN OF THE DEAD because Romero's second picture was DAWN OF THE DEAD. *(Laughter.)*

LAMAR: *What are you working on now, anything you can talk about?*

BILL: Yes. I was working over at Disney

here for the first time — comics with all the best artists."



Imagineering, as one of the concept designers for the new European Disneyland that's going to be in France. I not only designed parts of the park, I also got to do concept work for the park peripheral areas. And I also worked on some new projects at DisneyWorld in Orlando, and additions to Tokyo Disneyland, and the Disney Studio Tours in Florida.

And **Dan O'Bannon** and I have this secret plan which we'll announce here for the first time — we both love comics so much and are so frustrated that we can't make a living at it because it doesn't pay what other comparable fields pay, our goal is to become fabulously wealthy directors so that we can then do comics and not have to worry about our finances, and publish our own books with lavishly high and appropriate production values. We want to do comics with all of the best artists. ☐

(Unfortunately, Lamar and Susan ran out of time at this point, with questions unasked! Fortunately, David Seidman was available to take the baton and go for the finish line — be sure to look for it in the next COMICS INTERVIEW!

"My first job was in the shipping department. Then

BYRON ERICKSON

As we go to press, Gladstone Publishing has just learned that it is losing its license to the Disney characters. Disney will now publish its own comic book line. With financial and marketing resources that other publishers can only dream about, Disney believes it can be a major force in comic books. Does this mean Gladstone is dead? Not necessarily. Although it no longer will be publishing regular Disney comics, Gladstone is negotiating to publish the new line of hardbound reprints of classic Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse stories. In addition, Disney has expressed interest in having Gladstone act as its editorial coordinator — assembling talent and editing stories for the new comics line. If this happens, Gladstone editor Byron Erickson could be busier than ever. With this in mind, here's a look at how Gladstone is operating now and a chat with the man at its helm.

JOHN LUSTIG: *To me it seems you've got the best job in the world. How'd that come about?*

BYRON ERICKSON: Bruce Hamilton started up the company in the early 1980s to produce lithographs and publish THE CARL BARKS LIBRARY. I'd known Bruce for umpteen years because we both collect comics. So he called me up and said, "Hey, want to come work for me?" My first job was in the shipping department. Then we got a stat camera and I ran the stat camera. And when we got a typesetter I ran the typesetter. And when we needed someone to keep track of everything then I became the production manager. And then we started the comics and I said *(shifting to a whining voice),* "Please! Please! Let me be the editor!" and so Bruce said, "OK!"

JOHN: *So there you have it. If you want to get a job in comics — know Bruce Hamilton and start in the mailroom.*

BYRON: And you have to whine at the right time.

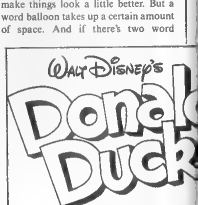
JOHN: *So what exactly do you do?*

BYRON: Bascally, I choose the stories that are supposed to go into the comics. We have a mixture of reprinted American stories; foreign stories that are new to American readers; and new stories of our own by **Don Rosa, William Van Horn,** and yourself. The new stuff takes care of itself. As much as we can get we use — within our budget. For the American reprints — depending on what the comic book is — I chose a nice Mickey Mouse serial by **Paul Murry** or a **Carl Barks** story.

As to the foreign stories, for the last few years we've been getting copies of all the Danish comics, Dutch comics, Brazilian comics, Italian comics, etc. Every once-in-awhile I sit down and look through those. And if the art looks good and the story appears to be interesting — even though I can't read the languages — I'll write down the code number. Then I'll order it through Disney and they'll send us black-and-white photostats.

JOHN: *But one thing you have to do that most editors don't is you have to have the stories re-scripted. I know you do some of them yourself. And you have to fit your words into the existing word balloons.*

BYRON: Well, pretty much. We do change a lot of the word balloons just to make things look a little better. But a word balloon takes up a certain amount of space. And if there's two word



AR 133

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Byron Erickson
Born: 3 February 1951 Tucson, AZ
Occupation: Editor-in-Chief at Gladstone Publishing
Previous Occupation: Newspaper circulation department
Favorite TV Show: ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL.
Favorite Movie: "I would say CITIZEN KANE — only in that I can stand to watch it more than once. Most movies I couldn't."
Favorite Duck Story: "Froggy Farmer" in WALT DISNEY'S COMICS AND STORIES #236 in which Donald Duck thinks he's developed a formula for raising giant frogs. His plans to sell frog legs to French restaurants doesn't exactly work out, though. "It's just something I remember, as a kid, as being a great story."
Favorite Superhero Story: JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #21 & #22, which re-introduces the Justice Society of America
Shoe Size: 9½

All artwork accompanying this interview ©1989 Walt Disney Company, unless otherwise noted.

we got a stat camera and I ran the stat camera."

balloons in the panel, you can't have one be three times as long because the artist didn't draw it that way. You'd have to cut out part of the art. So you try — in your head — to come close to fitting the words in and then you can make the little adjustments on the size of the balloons

JOHN: *Maybe you should explain why you have to re-script. After all, don't you get translations of the foreign stories from Disney?*

BYRON: Right. The Danish stories that we use - at least according to Denmark — are all written by writers from England. They brag about how they have former writers from MONTY PYTHON — although I don't believe it. *(Laughter.)* Well, the reason we have to re-script the dialogue on those is that it's lousy. It's incredibly sophomoric and moronic. It's like *(spoken in the halting, bored voice of a first-grader reading aloud from a primer),* "Oh, look! We are falling off the roof! We are going to be hurt! Oh, I am scared!"

JOHN: *Is that the translation?*

BYRON: It's not a translation. Supposedly they write it in English. The Danish stories are produced by a company called Gutenberghus. They have licenses in something like seven countries — Finland, Germany, etc. And each country translates it into their own language. They write their scripts in English to make it easier to go all around to the various countries. And I think that since — until we started — they thought that none of this stuff was going to be printed in English. So they don't even bother to put any thought into the dialogue.

JOHN: *Oh, so you've got the original English scripts. In that case I can understand why they'd be fairly simple.*

BYRON: Even the ones that do try to do a good job have such heavy Britishisms in them that we have to rewrite them.

JOHN: *That's bizarre! So, despite Donald Duck being an American character many of the stories are written in England, produced in Denmark, sent all over Europe and then they're picked up here in the U.S. and rewritten? It seems kind of roundabout!*

BYRON: Yeah — and a lot of them are probably drawn in South America! Anyway what it comes down to is that the writers probably don't figure they have to put any thought into the dialogue because they don't think anyone is going to use their dialogue. Or — if the writers do — then they should be shot! *(Laughter.)* On the other hand, if we get a story from Holland then we'll get a translation. But a literal translation just doesn't cut it. It just doesn't read right.

JOHN: *When you get these stories do you often change them a great deal? After all you can change the direction of a story a lot with new dialogue.*

BYRON: Almost always on the Danish stories we change the stories as much as we can. In some cases that isn't all that much — particularly if it's a short story and it's tightly plotted. But in other ones you can really go to town.

JOHN: *You're printing stories with pretty varied approaches to the Disney ducks. Is that ever a problem?*

BYRON: There is a diversity of approaches, but it's not as wide as you might think. There are differences in art styles. But I think the basic approach is the same. The characters are still consistent. Uncle Scrooge still acts like Uncle Scrooge. Now there are some really strange things being printed around the world that we don't touch. Particularly in Brazil and Italy and France. They have Super Donald where he's a superhero in a mask

JOHN: *Good God!*

BYRON: It works for them. It's popular there. They have the regular Donald Duck and then they have that too. But we don't touch that.

JOHN: *Well, there goes my script for*

DAISY'S TWADDLE AND WADDLE SOCIETY IS ABOUT TO GET ITSELF INVOLVED IN YET ANOTHER PHILANTHROPIC BLITZ!
IT'S REALLY VERY EXCITING, LADIES!

"No super-heroes — please! *(Laughter.)*"

Walt Disney's
Donald Duck
in
CALL OFF THE WILD
AH, THE JOYS OF CAMPING! FRESH AIR! SNOW-FED STREAMS! AND THE TIMID SOUNDS OF TINY CREATURES!
PERFECT! THE PIERCING CALL OF A HOOD-EARED MOUNTAIN MOUSE . . .
EEP EEK
. . . OF THE FAMILY MICKEOUS RODENTUS!
EEK!
EEP
AND NOW FOR THE CALL OF THE SAGE OWL . . .
WHOOK WHOO
. . . OF THE FAMILY WISEUS WHOOZIZ!
WHOOK WHOO
HEY!
ZOW
THAT'S ENOUGH, YOU PIPSQUEAK PIED PIPERS!

Duck-Man! (Laughter.)

BYRON: No super-heroes, please! *(Laughter.)*

JOHN: *I find it nice, though, that there's room for an approach like Don Rosa's which is very different from Bill Van Horn's.*

BYRON: Yeah. **Rosa** is very good at epic-type adventure and he likes to do a little bit of continuity and things like that. And **Van Horn's** just a really funny guy. He's come up with some really neat adventures too, but he's more cartoon oriented. By that I mean his stories are structured so that . . . here comes a gag! And here comes a gag! And here comes a **gag** — plus it moves the plot along. That's probably — in many cases — closer to the way that **Barks** himself put his stories together.

JOHN: *Once upon a time WALT DISNEY'S COMICS AND STORIES was the most popular comic book in America. For the last 25 years or so funny animals have been out of vogue and superheroes have been all the rage. Do you think that will ever change?*

BYRON: No, I don't think so. I mean we're doing better than Western Publishing did in its later years. But I think as

"It's cool to read SPIDER-MAN and BATMAN."

long as distribution is basically done through the comic shops that super-heroes will be more popular.

JOHN: *Why?*

BYRON: Oh, I just remember myself! When I was 13 years old or so - as much as I loved the **Barks** stories and **Paul Murry's** Mickey Mouse stories I thought, "Gee, I've got to stop reading these. This is kid stuff."

JOHN: *Yeah, I went through that too.*

BYRON: So you go through that stage. Then, years later, you finally realize, "How stupid can you be?"

JOHN: *Right, it's almost like you have to grow up a bit before you can realize that these aren't just for kids.*

BYRON: But I think if you go to an average comic book shop most of the customers are kids that are 13, 14, or 15 and it's cool to read SPIDER-MAN and BATMAN. I don't think they would be caught dead reading UNCLE SCROOGE.

JOHN: *Gee, maybe I should go back to that super duck script. (Laughter.)*

BYRON: *(Laughter.)* I don't think it would help!

JOHN: *Are you ever going to commission some new Mickey Mouse stories?*

BYRON: Well, if we could find someone who could draw Mickey then it would be nice!

JOHN: *Well, maybe we will now. I'd love to write some.*

BYRON: There have been a lot of people who have sent in samples for Mickey. There was one guy actually who did a real good job of it, but I think we just never got together with him. It just didn't work out. Mickey is a very, very hard character. Either you do a classic sort of **Floyd Gottfredson** adventure or you end up using Mickey in a short comedy story. Nobody's ever really done a Mickey that's suitable for say a 10-page funny story. That's why when you look at the old Western Publishing comics with Mickey stories by **Paul Murry** and **Jack Bradbury** it was mostly all adventure. They had shorter backups but I don't think they ever worked very well. **Daan Jippes** came real close. He did one Mickey story that we published that was a five- or six-pager.

JOHN: *The one with the crows.*

BYRON: Right.

JOHN: *Yeah, it was pretty good.*

BYRON: Yes, because he rethought the idea. He made Mickey a competent guy who has no control over what happens to him — not through any fault of his own. And I think that's probably the approach you have to take with Mickey.

You can't have Mickey acting like Donald. Donald is — for the most part — the architect of his own downfall. Mickey can't be that way. It doesn't work.

JOHN: *Mickey always triumphs.*

BYRON: Yeah, and if you're going to have him not triumphing and basically comedy is based on someone failing — then you're going to have to really, really think the plot out carefully. You'd have to have it so that no matter what Mickey does it's the right thing for all the wrong reasons and so it doesn't work.

JOHN: *I love those swashbuckling Mickey Mouse adventures that Gottfredson did, but it's hard to do that in a 10-page story.*

BYRON: Yeah, basically that's the thing. You either have to do an adventure or a comedy. And Mickey is probably better suited for adventures.

LOOK, BOYS! IT'S A RARE TWO-TONE MINK!
NO, UNCA DONALD! DON'T TOUCH HIM!
YEEK
YEEK! IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN, THAT'S THE CALL OF A SKUNKED DUCK!
YEAH - OF THE FAMILY STINKUS DUCKUS!

"I started as a comic reader: The Lone Ranger, Roy

JOEL

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Rogers, Bugs Bunny and Porky Pig, Mickey Mouse, Lulu."

THINGVALL

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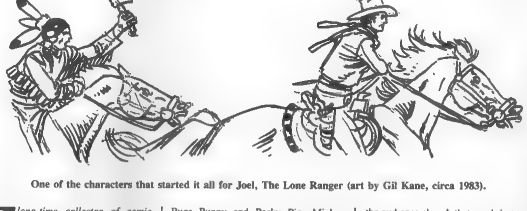

One of the characters that started it all for Joel, The Lone Ranger (art by Gil Kane, circa 1983).

A long-time collector of comic books, a comic book store manager and owner, dealer and collector of original comic art, co-producer of comic book conventions, writer for the Buyer's Guide for Comic Fandom and other fan publications, Joel Thingvall enjoys talking about the business end of the comic world. Fellow Twin Cities fan David Mruz interviewed Joel in his Minnesota home.

DAVID MRUZ: *A bit of background. You've been a comics fan . . .*

JOEL THINGVALL: First, I started as a comic reader. The memories are still there. The Lone Ranger, Roy Rogers, Bugs Bunny and Porky Pig, Mickey Mouse, Little Lulu. I was in an after-school child care environment and the sitter had a box of heavily read humor and adventure comics from the mid-'50s. I spent many an hour after school, reading Dells and Classics and enjoying them. The words and pictures were delightful to the young eye. Occasionally I sit back now and think about the "sense of wonder" I had when I first experienced comic books.

DAVE: *A feeling that a comic fan seems to lack as he grows older . . .*

JOEL: Correct. We look at artistic techniques, worry about continuity, and constantly analyze why we are being manipulated. Seldom, it seems, will the experienced "comic fan" sit back and enjoy a comic for its pure and simplistic fantasy entertainment value. A "comic book" is exaggerated fantasy. People are not really like this. Comic books are for the imagination. They are serious issues and characters on a more continual basis. But for now comics are fodder to be enjoyed. This is a hobby that is starting to take itself way too seriously. And the business end hasn't decided "who" their audience is, and who that they wish to pander to, in order to create well-read and successful comic book awareness (i.e., sales and readership). Anyone can publish 5,000 copies of something and have people read it. But half a million, a million? Has the audience shrunk that much in twenty years?

DAVE: *Yes, and some of that can be blamed on alternative forms of entertainment, such as television, more live entertainment, the video scene.*

JOEL: I agree, yes. Formats have to change. This has been talked about for the past decade. Some progress is being made. I feel major thought has to be given to the shelf life of comic book characters. I applaud DC Comics, Inc. and their ambition to keep DARK KNIGHT in print.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Joel Thingvall
Born: 16 September 1953
Occupation: juvenile justice research, University of Minnesota
Favorite Comics: Nexus, Spider-Man, Jon Sable, newspaper continuity strips
What Do You Collect: original comic-related art
Why: because I like to

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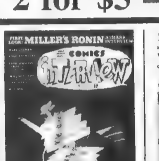

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"DYNASTY uses a kind of comic-book storytelling technique."

People won't read what they cannot find, and the back issue boxes in a comic book shop are not the secret to keeping a title alive. It's promotion, careful marketing, periodically making the public aware of the product. But I stray from the direction this interview was heading.

DAVE: *You started as a reader. Naturally, from there, you had to become a collector?*

JOEL: No, there's another step in there. It's called accumulation. One obtains comics for the sake of having comics to read over and over again. When you have to make a decision to get rid of the comics that you have accumulated, and you decide not to, then you become a collector. You also become a collector when you start setting sights on what you need to be fulfilled as a comics reader, like past issues or the next issue of a title.

DAVE: *Continuity, keeping a reader interested in a story, a policy comic books constantly used to generate many a collector, isn't it?*

JOEL: I remember getting hooked on the continuity of WALT DISNEY'S COMICS AND STORIES. I had to have those continued stories of Mickey and Goofy stalked by Black Pete, or whatever his name was. Television loves to do this with viewers, too. They want you back next week, or the week after. I don't watch the soaps, except for DYNASTY. Now DYNASTY uses a kind of comic-book storytelling technique. They want you to return week after week. But skip a few weeks, tune in to a later adventure, and you really haven't don't feel that you missed anything of importance. Kind of like SPIDER-MAN. We want to see his romantic life from issue to issue, but stop reading it for a year and you don't get all disjointed with guilt because you missed something earthshattering. Seldom will continuity breed earthshattering results. Instead it feeds and creates a false need of knowing.

DAVE: *I noticed that with some other titles, like THOR . . .*

JOEL: Or DAREDEVIL. Editors, artists and writers change. I really don't want to know why Thor has a beard and wears a helmet. It really isn't that important for enjoying the book. When you think about it, you are not going to feel at a loss if you don't know the detailed developments of why Matt Murdock no longer is an attorney with Foggy Nelson and now lives in Hell's Kitchen rather than his split level penthouse with one whole floor of exercise equipment.

DAVE: *We keep drifting. Back to the basics. Continuity creates an interest in*

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What many comic fans still consider the "definitive" look for DAREDEVIL. . . by Eugene Colan.

reading comics.

JOEL: I entered the fantasy world of the superhero comic because one title led to another. The comic book advertising was such that they told you what to purchase week after week. The plugs were there for the next issue. House ads told you that Superman also appeared in ACTION, in WORLD'S FINEST. This started after my introduction to the superhero, as I was there in the beginning of their silver age revival. I distinctly remember reading the Justice League of America in SHOWCASE and getting caught up in the Weisinger era of the Superman Family, the delights of the influx of superheroes like GREEN LANTERN, FLASH and THE ATOM, the adventures of the CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN and the world of SGT. ROCK. What dinosaur fan could not buy a comic that featured "the war that time forgot."

DAVE: *Dinosaurs and guns and lost and forgotten worlds . . .*

JOEL: War comics were extremely big in the early Sixties. World War II concepts, a war that could be fought behind trees and in trenches. It still took a bullet to kill or an exploding shell to maim. The baby boomers were running around terrorizing the neighborhood with combat helmets worn by dad in the big one, shooting battery powered machine guns and throwing grenades that exploded with water. Always used to get into fights on who shot who first. We started to hear in the late Sixties about the new warfare for dropping napalm and wiping out towns. World War II was still considered man against man, or man against machine. When World War II tactics are placed in a Vietnam War setting, it all seems so

"Remember when as college students we used to read comics buried

senseless. Why send out a dozen men to scout a village, have them discover that it is enemy controlled, suffer a couple of casualties, and then call for napalm. But back to comics . . .

DAVE: *When did you actually become a collector?*

JOEL: It was Marvel Comics that made me a bonafide collector. My first Marvel purchase consisted of Thor fighting the Hulk and Spider-Man cowering in the shadows as Sandman terrorized the streets looking for him. From then on, I was hooked. I had to have Marvel Comics. There were even comic book vending machines around in those days and they always had more than just the current months titles. I remember purchasing all the comics above the Marvel title just to get the Marvel title.

DAVE: *What were you, rich or something?*

JOEL: No, just stupid. I had become a collector, a comic addict. There was this need that had to be fulfilled. Happily there were only so many "back issues" readily available, so I quickly left the vending machine era and discovered the corner store outlet. I found the perfect shop in the corner drugstore. Now you must remember that Marvel was only publishing about a dozen comics monthly, and once you became a Marvel fan, you probably only needed a half-dozen DC comics to survive, plus an occasional Sad Sack or funny animal title. Well, I struck up a pleasant deal with the druggist in which I opened up his magazines every Tuesday and Thursday, did the inventory, and he would give me six or seven comics a week. Again, remember, this was the early sixties. Your weekly comic habit could be supported on fifty cents or a buck a week.

DAVE: *How long did you have this arrangement.*

JOEL: Through junior high school, roughly 1968, then Marvel split their titles and I couldn't afford to buy all the new comics (only fifteen cents a crack, a quarter for an annual), so I did what any fool did back then and remaindered about half my collection of comics out to a fellow a couple of years younger than I. This fellow was an active accumulator on the verge of becoming a full-fledged dealer.

DAVE: *What was the comics market like back then?*

JOEL: We didn't care as much about condition. People would write their names on comics to identify them as part of their collection. Some who read them constantly taped the spines to keep them in better shape (before magic tape). We didn't store them in plastic. Usually kept them flat or in file cabinets with cardboard dividers. You would usually find old issues at garage sales or used bookstores for a nickel or a dime. Occasionally I see a comic from the sixties being sold with yellowed tape on the spine and I know

BEFORE PT 221 COULD FIRE A SINGLE WEAPON AT THE ENEMY...A NEW THREAT AROSE FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE SEA...
EEERRROAR!
PT 221
ANOTHER GIANT MONSTER JUST GRABBED THE ENEMY SHIP! IT'S SQUEEZING IT LIKE AN UNDERSEA BOA CONSTRICTOR! IT'S TRYING TO DRAG IT UNDER!

One of Joel's favorite comic stories "The War That Time Forgot." The art is by Neal Adams (pencils & inks).

in a PEOPLE or a ROLLING STONE while riding the bus?"

A book that started Joel's interest in comics, Tale of Mystery (THOR)#112, 1964. Art by Jack Kirby, who else?...

immediately whose collection it once belonged to. Another fellow had a wonderful collection of duck comics, quit collecting for a decade, and I remember him bringing them to Comic City to sell and they didn't want them. Too battered, too well read for any dollar worth. He ended up selling them to the store, for a bit more than cover price. The store sold them as "reader copies." Ironically, he did do well on the sale. Sure, he wasn't paid hundreds of dollars for the comics, but he was paid more than he ever spent on the comics in the first place, plus he had fifteen years of reading enjoyment out of them.

DAVE: *And people traded comics?*

JOEL: I remember trading, around 1966, FANTASTIC FOUR #1 and AMAZING FANTASY #15, in a battered sort of condition (G-VG) for HULK #1-6 and the two part FANTASTIC FOUR when they battled the Hulk, plus a golden age CAPTAIN MARVEL. I remember shuddering when I actually paid a friend a dollar for DAREDEVIL #1 in 1967 and feeling that my parents would be peeved if they found out that I was paying this outrageous sum for a ten-cent comic.

DAVE: *When did trading disappear?*

JOEL: Right at the end of the sixties. A marketplace was already around for old comics. **Howard Rogofsky** comes to *mind* immediately as his ads were the ones most collectors responded to first. The ROCKET'S BLAST* COMIC COLLECTOR was in existence. I strongly feel that the juvenile comic fan born between 1948 and 1955 was, in the late sixties, entering an age where they made money and would rather spend and have a comic in their collection than give up a title for another comic. This was a strong period of comic collecting. We went after issues of a comic title. We wanted continuous runs, the whole shebang. Comics were selling three to five times as many issues then as they are now, and I didn't know any area collectors who were buying multiple copies of a title.

DAVE: *Other collectors? Did this lead to comics fandom?*

JOEL: Yeah. But only in a neighborhood sort of way. I sold half my collection in 1968. Believe it or not, by 1972, I reacquired every book I had ever sold, plus some.

DAVE: *Okay, about comics fandom.*

JOEL: There were neighborhood people. We would gather and argue about superheroes and their strengths. We had artistic favorites and such. But outside of this community, no knowledge whatsoever. But then someone got an RBCC, and they got COMIC WORLD, and **Mark Hanerfeld's** fanzine, the early COMIC READER. One of these occasional oddities would be passed to the entire community of neighborhood collectors. MARVELMANIA came on board and seemed more of a continuous deal than the one-shot Merry Marvel Marching Society. But I feel the major introduction of the comic collector to comic fandom was **Alan Light** and his BUYER'S GUIDE FOR COMIC FANDOM.

DAVE: *Why is that?*

JOEL: He reached an enormous audience and introduced them to back issues, the

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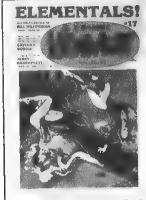

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"I remember shuddering when I paid $1 for DD#1 in '67."

fan press, creative fanzines, and the wide spectrum of titles that were published by a variety of comic book companies, both present and past.

DAVE: *How so?*

JOEL: Jumping to the present for a moment. I, as a comics fan, cannot understand why the current crop of 10-12 year olds ignore CBG, AMAZING HEROES, the COMICS JOURNAL, COMICS INTERVIEW, et al. But think. What is the one item lacking in the young collector that the older, more established comic fan and collector has more of when they reach 16, 18, 20, or, in our case, the thirties?

DAVE: *Brains and appreciation of fine comics, their historic background and . . .*

JOEL: Wrong! Give me a break, okay? It is money. To the young, to the collector still entranced with the world of the superhero, the desire to purchase two comics for $1.50 or three comics for $2.25 is greater than buying the overpriced "white" paper books or a magazine that publishes interviews or news on comics. This is a luxury. Comic-related items are not needed to enjoy this hobby. The young comic fan is not ready for expanding horizons, and as the elder collector spends more and more time in this hobby we forget that at one time we would have thought that Marvel's SECRET WARS and DC's BOOSTER GOLD or Gladstone's DONALD DUCK were fun comics, fine amusement, and a good read. Instead we suddenly feel we have to read WATCHMAN, DARK KNIGHT, DREADSTAR, or DAREDEVIL to be considered with it, although for pure enjoyment, we still read SPIDER-MAN and the TEEN TITANS when no one is looking. Remember when as college students we used to read comics buried in a PEOPLE or a ROLLING STONE while riding the bus? Well, I often find that when I'm buying SPIDER-MAN and TEEN TITANS these days I make sure to announce that "these are for my nephew, he loves them, blah, blah, blah."

DAVE: *Now let's go back to THE BUYER'S GUIDE FOR COMICS FANDOM.*

JOEL: When it first came out, it was free. FREE! You write **Alan Light** a letter, and he'll send THE BUYER'S GUIDE TO COMIC FANDOM to you, and every month, later twice a month, it arrived in your mail box, free. How could you pass this deal up. Even when he started charging for the newspaper, it wasn't bad, because my economic security had increased and a few bucks necessary to subscribe wasn't really that much of an investment. I think RB*CC was half a buck an issue back then. You would get TCK for a quarter. You could send stamps and a quarter and get a variety of limited-edition newszines

DAVE: *And this, naturally, led to comics fandom, fanzines . . .*

JOEL: And self-publishing. I joined Capa-Alpha. I joined New York Apa. I was a member of Myrnad and the Southern

The 1st two appearances of SPIDER-MAN (Amazing Fantasy#15, and his own first issue). Both covers were penciled by Jack Kirby, the designer of Spider-Man's costume.

"I joined Supergraphics partly because of FOOM (Friends

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Fandom Press Alliance. An apa is simply a core group of people (10-50) who produce a zine monthly, quarterly — whatever the requirements — for the other members in that group. An apa has been a forum for satire, artists, storytellers, and also as an exchange of commentary. CAPA-Alpha (send five bucks to CAPA-Alpha, 2097 Niles Avenue, St. Paul MN 55116, and you'll join the waitlist plus receive a sample mailing of this monthly apa) which I am currently the central mailer of, has a diverse membership of people who have been founding members of fandom, noted professionals, and just general good folk. **Don** and **Maggie Thompson, Roy Thomas, Wendy Pini, Carl Gafford, Jim Korkis, Mark Evanier,** the **McGeehan brothers, Jim Schumeister, Carol Kalish, Neal Pozner, Tony Isabella, Sam Kobish, Richard Howell, Gary Brown, Mark Worden, Ward Batty.** The list goes on and on. **Meloney Chadwick, "Rocky" Bronstein, Guy Lillian III, Paul Kupperberg.** And this thing has been around for 250 issues. DC Comics colorist and noted SHADOW collector **Anthony Tollin**, a former Minneapolis guy who I met upon joining K-a and who introduced me further to fanzines and such was a member. **Joe Brancatelli. Jeff Gelb. Dwight Decker. Mike Raud. Fred Patten.** The roster constantly changes. Witty, intelligent people who produce a good read month after month.

DAVE: *Let's get a perspective. Where were you in life at this point?*

JOEL: I was in college. Actually, I left for awhile, put in a stint at Supergraphics, the **Steranko** company, in 1974. I joined Supergraphics partly because of FOOM (Friends of Ol'Marvel), and a deep knowledge of Marvel Comics history. **George Olshevsky** had his MARVEL INDEX on computer and was constantly looking for input into creative and character references and such. I had developed quite an eye for penciller/inker and lettering recognition and went over George's index book by book adding my input which was either confirmed or overruled by others, over time. This bit of historical overviewing has given me a "consultant" listing in the MARVEL INDEX series currently being published. Thanks, George! One of the projects under discussion at Supergraphics when I joined them was an index of the entire Marvel line up to that point in time, complete with character drawings and such. It never materialized.

DAVE: *Steranko was quite a fellow, wasn't he?*

JOEL: Unfortunately, many current comic collectors have no idea who he is, especially now that his MEDIASCENE is so slick and tends to be more mainstream film oriented. To do a typical public relations tribute to the man, I'd have to say that the action, excitement and effects he brought to the medium influenced many of the current talents in the industry. He brought back a flow to the comics page that only occasionally showed up in the past. His writing, flavored with the prose best exemplified by the pulps and entertainment fiction, kept his stories alive and running. He cared about content, appearance (coloring and lettering) and wanted to entertain. I don't know if many people realize or care, but I'm going to pass along some tidbits: **Greg Theakston**, an illustrator, inker for **Gary Groth**, headhoncho of Fantagraphics, was a **Steranko** employee after I left in 1974. And **Ken Bruzenak**, who has been creating quite a storm in the lettering field (MR. MONSTER, AMERICAN FLAGG, etc.) with his outstanding calligraphy, spent at least a decade as **Steranko's** assistant.

DAVE: *And where did you go after Supergraphics?*

JOEL: I had a mime festival commitment lined up — walking in place, soaring through the air, creating something out of nothing. Then decided to further pursue higher education and expand my theatrical knowledge and journalistic efforts. Back then I could make more money writing a 250 word movie critique than some of my friends did writing an eight page comic book story. Also, it seemed, all comic book artists had this desire to leave the no

# of Ol'Marvel), and a deep knowledge of Marvel history."

frills world of comic books and become paperback cover painters, the profession where the money was. My, how times have changed, eh?

DAVE: *Royalties, incentives, production contracts, creator rights. People forget that this stuff didn't exist in the early Seventies.*

JOEL: Yeah, if you did comics, you were doing it for the enjoyment, hoping that it would lead to more lucrative fields – storyboarding, real scriptwriting, painting, even advertising. But that didn't concern me. I was still a low life. I worked part-time at Comic City from 1975-1978 in the Twin Cities, taking summers off to perform in theatre. I also had a very enjoyable and modest career as an entertainment writer for a decade. Comic City was the life, though. Surrounded by comics, sorting and cataloging all day . . . a comic collectors dream come true. Minnesota's Comic City was one of the first major "comic book only" stores in the country, and I always felt proud of the Comic City Art Gallery, established by original owner **Bob Selvig**, that showcased work from my collection of originals, originals that **Selvig** had accumulated, and also spotlighted local talent. The local artists who illustrated ads, flyers, catalog covers and such for Comic City are a fine lot and have proven themselves with further professional sales in the business: **Matt Feazell, Bill Fugate, Rich Larson, Charles Smith.**

DAVE: *I met you . . .*

JOEL: Earlier than the time we're talking about. You wrote an open letter in the BUYER'S GUIDE calling comics an "art form" or some such claptrap and I wrote back. I said that comics were entertainment and produced purely as a throwaway item with all artisticness being overshadowed by the production-line mentalities that have plagued the industry since the beginning of time, and on and on. I heard back from you (and some other irate local fans). We talked. Exchanged views. You were trying to get comic fandom organized in the state. I put in an occasional appearance at club meetings, at your backyard gatherings, at the early comic conventions, not really getting involved.

DAVE: *You were always kind of "there" and interested in the hobby . . .*

JOEL: But no interest in being a mover or shaker. Hey, comics were fun. As a fan I was working on collection #3. I sold most of collection #2 in 1972 for college financing, right on the ground floor of the "bucks for books" binge. I look back at the seventies as a collector and keep kicking myself that I didn't spend, spend, spend on back issues. But, who cares. I enjoyed comics. The whole "worth" thing just detracts from the joy of collecting and reading the four color things. And people forget that all comics are not worth big bucks. A decade later many of the westerns I sold in 1972 were still gathering dust in the back room of the store that bought my collection. And again, we deal with the economic status of the hobby. As an individual, I would flinch at buying a comic related item for $500 a decade ago. Now, if I want it, I don't have to think twice. Unfortunately, that same $500 item now sells for $3,000 and I cannot afford it.

DAVE: *But our paths didn't really cross until . . .*

JOEL: 1977. My first convention. You had become frustrated with fandom, in general. I thought I could do a convention, create a little profit, have a bit of fun. You said "go ahead," allowed me to use the mailing list you had from your past efforts I had this hatred of talking to people, have always been a behind-the-scenes type of person, so I appointed fellow Comic City employee **Chris Budel** as chairman (that title, a crazy hat, and the opportunity to ask dealers and fans if they were having a good time was his honor) of the 1977 Minneapolis Comic Convention and the beginning of a convention dynasty materialized.

DAVE: *It was simply a dealer show with an art show, but the turnout was tremendous. It was held at a real dump . . .*

Poster painting of Smilin' STAN LEE. It was also used for the cover of Marvel's F.O.O.M. #17 (art by Arnold Sawyer).

"He (Steranko) brought back a flow to the comics page

JOEL: The Dyckman Hotel. They tore it down the next year, I believe.

DAVE: *And people generally had a good time.*

JOEL: Comic conventions in Minnesota have always been a good time. We pride on being informal and laid back.

DAVE: *And then plans developed for a 1978 event.*

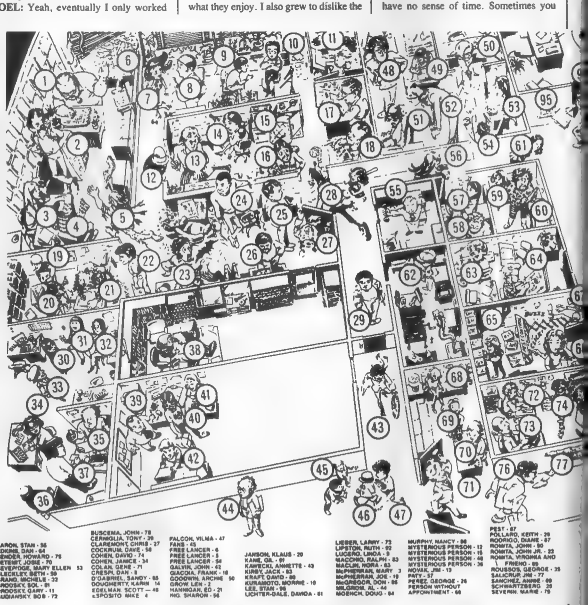
JOEL: I asked if you wanted to come aboard in 1978. You said, yes! Your speciality was programming, animation, films, communicating with area fans . . .

DAVE: *You have this thing about fans, don't you?*

JOEL: Yeah, eventually I only worked from opening until mid-afternoon at Comic City, and only during school days, the times when people were not flocking to the store. I took summers off to dance and prance and characterize. I loved sorting, pricing, restocking books, doing ads, inventory, want lists. All those exiting, mundane jobs. But I really detested talking to fanboys, an occupational hazard of being involved in comic fandom. My tolerance was very low for discussing the joys of THE HULK over CAPTAIN AMERICAN, SUPERMAN over THE CREEPER. To me a comic is a comic. You read what you enjoy. Others read what they enjoy. I also grew to dislike the speculator, the person who thought they were going to make a killing on comics.

DAVE: *But you sold your collections, isn't that a form of speculation?*

JOEL: I'll get to that later, but let's get back to conventions. I wanted to do good conventions, felt there was a way to have fun, meet talent that I wanted to meet, talk only to fans that I wanted to talk with, have an enjoyable time, create goodwill and also let people know that others collect comics. Mostly the conventions were to have a good time. I developed a system where all preparations were through the mail. Comic fans are unbelievable. They have no sense of time. Sometimes you



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The old Marvel BULLPEN, as seen in the early 70s. The personnel sure have changed.

that only occasionally showed up in the past — he cared."

swear they don't even know how to read. You think they can only understand pictures. The one year we ran an informational phone number and we would get calls at all hours asking "what are the days of the convention," "how much is admission," "who are the guests?" You would ask were they got the number. They would respond "on this flyer in front of me!" And all that information would be on the flyer.

DAVE: *Dealers?*

JOEL: They never made enough money. Eighty bucks for a couple of tables with a weekend return of hundreds or even a couple of thousand dollars, and they would gripe and groan. I'm always amazed that dealers seldom bring material to conventions that differs from what they have in their stores. They don't bargain stuff out. They don't even promote their business.

DAVE: *And fans who attended the convention?*

JOEL: These were the lucky people. It was frustrating when the convention would spend all these bucks to bring guests in, and the fan who paid three bucks would get to meet **John Byrne** and talk to him longer than I did, would be able to join **Mike Grell** for a snack, meet with **Jim Shooter** after the convention closed for the day, socialize with **Bob Clampett** in the party suite. And why? Because a convention organizer, unfortunately, can be too busy to enjoy a convention that they produce. I kept wishing I could pay admission and attend one of our conventions as a fan.

DAVE: *There's a sense of dissatisfaction with the process?*

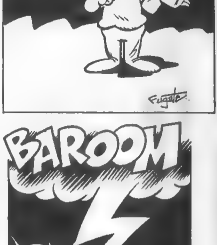
JOEL: Eventually, one can listen to dealers complaining about table locations, lighting, prices, why no one is buying their comics only so long before you don't care. If you have people assist with a convention, you do better going outside the hobby, finding people totally uninterested in the field. You had that problem with your early conventions. People scheduled to watch the art show would get so caught up in listening to a guest speak, or getting a good deal, that they wouldn't show up to watch an art room, or help with registration, or assist in the areas they were assigned. Sure, these are mundane things. I would rather have done this stuff than listen to complaints about heat, too many people, too few people, "someone is stealing comics," "can't I just make one more deal before I have to vacate my space?", "why do I have to leave at closing?"

DAVE: *And in 1983 ...*

JOEL: I told you, "this was the last convention." It cost six times as much as that show staged in 1977. The profit was still the same, barely enough to justify the time spent organizing the event. As the years rolled on from 1978 to 1983 the fun of doing conventions disappeared. The constant negotiation for hotel space, confirming guests, getting information to the comic fans, listening to dealers complain.

DAVE: *The fun is in participating, not organizing.*

JOEL: Someone else did a one day convention in the fall of 1985. It was the most fun I had at a local convention. We split a table for a cost of something like $15 each. I sold stuff for only two hours, got rid of everything I brought down and was happy. Spent fifteen minutes each talking with the guests. Walked around and said "hello" to many old familiar faces. All in one day. No preparation, no ego



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NOW EVERYONE THINKS HE'S A REALLY SUPER GUY!!
WHUT TH-?
FAN MAN
GIMME A BREAK!
YOU KNOW THE OLD SAYING—"A NEW BAROOM SWEEPS CLEAN!"
FAN MAN

"Fans seldom understand why a dealer won't pay price

massaging, no begging dealers to hand out flyers, no printing bills, hotel bills, guest expenses. Just could relax and watch someone else get frustrated.

DAVE: *But you became a dealer?*

JOEL: I purchased an interest in Comic City, yes, from the end of 1982 to the beginning of 1984. I was between jobs, the opportunity became available, and I became a partner with 1977 appointed comic convention chairman **Chris Budel**. I was surprised that the store was still retailing at the same level as it was when I worked there in 1978. Granted, there were a couple of ownership changes inbetween, but still, there hadn't been any growth in a market that had even increased its retail prices.

DAVE: *Any accomplishments as a store owner?*

JOEL: Comic City had a tremendous inventory. Massive amounts of comics were still in the basement that were originally purchased at the wholesale rate twelve years earlier. Except for specialized issues, comic fans seldom understand why a dealer won't pay price guide, current market value, or a decent percentage of PRICE GUIDE value for a back issue. Especially a back issue published since the advent of the comic shop.

DAVE: *Why don't you explain your thoughts on this?*

JOEL: Simple. Let's take a comic like PETER PARKER #1, a title that still had a following in 1983. The comic came out for twenty cents. The dealer purchased said book for twelve cents. Now, many years later, the dealer sells the book for $2. But the dealer has no need to buy any copies from collectors who wish to sell them unless he can get that book for a dime or so. The dealer has a hundred copies in his basement because of stocking attitudes of a decade ago.

DAVE: *Isn't that a lot of books to have, simply, "in the basement?"*

JOEL: It was only recently that the back issue market started to dry up. An early comic shop mentality was to keep 10% of all comics ordered as backstock, often up to 25% of key titles and issues. Remember that the price of comics in the 70s was two bits to half a buck. Sales were also a bit higher on most titles than now. So if you

Jim Steranko's S.H.I.E.L.D..

guide, current market value, or a decent percentage."

kept 15-25 copies of ACTION or SUPERMAN or even MARVEL TALES, you had a supply that would last a decade or so. I shudder to think how many copies of back issues are languishing in the basements of comic stores. Dealers do not need to buy most current comics from collectors because they still have backstock purchased at wholesale prices when the comic books were published

DAVE: *Wholesale prices?*

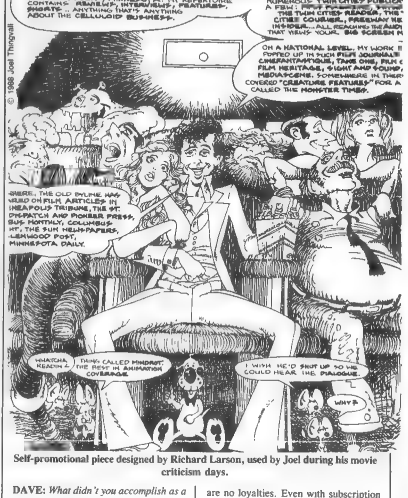
JOEL: In the beginning, Comic City was getting books for 20% off from the local distributor, later 40% from wholesalers like Seagate. When I was co-owner the store was getting books for 55% off minus shipping costs. If we ordered one hundred copies of a book, we had to sell only 50 to break even. On the majority of titles we needed only 3-5 copies for backstock. Now if we still had 45 copies to get rid of, I always felt that it was better to sell something and create a more continuous cash flow than to let books languish in the basement rafters waiting for the $2 back issue sale.

DAVE: *So, what did you strive to do?*

JOEL: I was not alone. I sold wholesale to other dealers, and speculators, a practice now common in the retail business of comics. Discounting new issues does not hurt a store. Selling out of a title really doesn't hurt a store. I would rather sell out of DARK KNIGHT at $2.95 a crack ($1.40 profit an issue) than have fifty copies collecting dust with the long-range hope of making an additional higher profit. For every "hot" back issue, the comic retailer can usually find another dozen titles in the basement that they would be glad to get a dime apiece for. You are tying up cash by keeping an extensive inventory. I could sell those PETER PARKER #1 for twenty cents wholesale and make a profit. The books were paid for, they weren't going anywhere in the basement. On the local level, I had established a way to wholesale out unsold copies of books that we ordered to another dealer on the other side of town, far enough away so as not to compete with our store, for anywhere from 20% to 40% of cover. I improved cash flow.

DAVE: *What did this accomplish?*

JOEL: Comic City, in the year I was involved, increased total sales 50% over the previous year. Because of wholesale policies, our profit margin on comics slipped a bit, 33% to 29%. We also experienced the very real "Black September" and felt the beginnings of a disappearing back issue market. But I accomplished most of what I felt I wanted to do.


HELLO, MOVIE PEOPLE. THE NAME IS JOEL THINGVALL, AND I WRITE ABOUT FILMS FROM THE COLD CONFINES OF MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA. MY REPERTOIRE CONTAINS: REVIEWS, INTERVIEWS, FEATURES, ESSAYS... ANYTHING THAT'S ANYTHING ABOUT THE CELLULOID BUSINESS.
MY WORKS APPEAR REGULARLY IN NUMEROUS NON-CITY PUBLICATIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE TWIN CITIES READER, THE TWIN CITIES COURIER, FREEWAY, THE INTERVIEW... ALL REGARDED THE AUDIO THAT VIEWS YOUR BIG SCREEN M
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WHATCHA READIN' A THING CALLED MINDRAT THE BEST IN ANIMATION COVERAGE
I WISH HE'D SHUT UP SO WE COULD HEAR THE PARODIES
WHY?

Self-promotional piece designed by Richard Larson, used by Joel during his movie criticism days.

DAVE: *What didn't you accomplish as a dealer?*

JOEL: Given time, I would like to have seen a greater promotional effort on the comic stores to introduce the medium to the youth and community served by each store. Too often comic stores try for an entire market. When you have a marketplace full of competing stores, you are constantly trying to outdo one another rather than working together. I fondly remember how, when I worked with Comic City in the seventies, a St. Paul store would call us up for some back issues for their customers. We would pull them out, sell them to this guy a tad cheaper than we advertised, and he would sell them to his people for a tad more than we would have.

DAVE: *Wouldn't you rather have that customer?*

JOEL: A comic fan will shop where they feel comfortable. I have discovered there are no loyalties. Even with subscription services. The customer will have final say. The worst a store can do is not sell comics to a customer. Then they are out some income and that customer will just shop elsewhere and, in all probability, badmouth the store that won't deal with them. Comic stores can have their competitive edge, but they can also still talk with each other. I have always been amazed that there is such keen competition by comic stores for customers who already collect comic books. But every year that we did conventions in town the different stores never, and I do mean never, promoted their own store. Here was an opportunity to tell collectors who shopped at all the other stores that their store existed. I always felt that rather than buy six tables and bring three truckloads of comics to a convention, what would happen if you had one table, backed by some attentive and smiling faces, handing out fliers to every

"Let others sit on the books with the hopes of profit."

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Two paperback collections, reprinting early issues in black & white. Both covers are paintings by Jack Kirby.

convention goer, giving discount coupons and directions to your store. Or have another table at the convention with interesting remainder stuff next to it, and another with some odd esoteric items that no other store sells in town. Instead you see box after box of X-MEN and TEEN TITANS priced the same as the other hundred full-time and closet dealers have priced their books, all crying for the collector's immediate dollar.

DAVE: *So you see . . .*

JOEL: A lack of self-promotion to the community that surrounds that comic business, and a lack of respect and exchange of views with others who sell comics in the area. Hopefully, this will change in Minnesota in the near future, partly because it is happening so successfully in other parts of the country.

DAVE: *You're not with Comic City anymore. Why not?*

JOEL: Time. The joys of being a small business man are doing things your own way. When you have partnerships and such, you always have to compromise. I could not give the store a proper time commitment to make sure my thoughts would be upheld on a daily basis. I wanted the store to operate my way! I'm stubborn. Also, I started working a real job, with real pay and benefits. I didn't need to work evenings or weekends, worry about slow times in the business, and could have paid sick time and holidays. The benefits of a real job far outweigh the joys of comics at cost. I enjoy my two kids and time with my wife, and comic books, on a fulltime basis, could not offer the security that I was currently seeking. Unfortunately, when I left Comic City, I decided to sell my collection. I could no longer afford to keep complete runs of each company. The weekly outlay, even at discount, was just tremendous.

DAVE: *Any final thoughts?*

JOEL: Yeah, when I sold my third collection I didn't make megabucks. Probably was lucky and got just what I paid for the books (I had to throw in the RAWHIDE KIDS and MILLIE THE MODELS). But, more importantly, I had thirteen years of enjoyment out of this last collection. I've started on my fourth collection, only buy comics I do enjoy reading and following. I care less about their worth. Unfortunately, I will play the marketplace. If someone feels LOVE AND ROCKETS #1, or the TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES are worth the bucks they are commanding in the marketplace, I'll sell my copies. After all, they have been reprinted in books that look much nicer on the shelf. Let others sit on the books with the hopes of making a profit, if they desire. I already made my profit when I purchased the comics new. I was able to savor them, read them, and enjoy them. Otherwise, why would I have brought them

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comics **123** *interview*

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LAST WORD

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LEGAL ACTION CONTEMPLATED

The purpose of this is to bring to light the highly questionable and deliberately misleading content of recent ads placed by **David Campiti** on behalf of his Innovation Comic Book Company in comic book adzines and fanzines.

In 1982, a college student in Michigan named **Howard Feltman** decided to publish an anthology of short comic-book style stories and contacted a number of artists asking to buy material for inclusion in this book, the artists retaining their individual copyrights to their work. In 1983, **Feltman's** Nautilus Dreams Company released the book, called VOYAGES, containing (among other short works) a one-page illustration by **Terry Austin,** four pages by **Howard Chaykin,** three pages by **Jay Muth,** eight pages by **Trina Robbins,** four pages by **Craig Russell,** a 21-page story by **Alex Toth,** and two pages by **Charles Vess.**

In 1989, **David Campiti** bought the remaining copies of unsold VOYAGES from **Mr. Feltman** for the purposes of wholesaling them to the retail market. We emphasize, this is not a reprint or reissue of this book by **Campiti** or Innovation, just the sale of a bunch of old books produced seven years ago by another company.

In 1989, in the pages of the COMICS BUYERS GUIDE and others, **Campiti** began advertising his newly-formed Innovation comic book line by including a reproduction of the cover of VOYAGES in his ad and listing the contributors to VOYAGES on a roster of professionals working for Innovation Comics.

We, the undersigned, wish to make it known that we have never worked for Innovation Comics or **David Campiti.**

To us, this is a situation vaguely akin to the local comic-book store claiming we work for them simply because they sell copies of CLOAK AND DAGGER, MOONSHADOW or BLACK KISS, or a video wholesaler claiming that **Harrison Ford** works for him because he sells videotapes of STAR WARS.

Later, in 1989, another ad appeared in the pages of the COMIC SHOP NEWS for April 29 that states: "INNOVATION: FULL COLOR SERIES BY THE BIGGEST NAMES IN COMICS ON SALE NOW!" along with cover reproductions of five comic books and a list of contributor names (headed "NOW AND IN THE MONTHS TO COME:" that includes those of **Terry Austin, John Byrne** and **Howard Chaykin** again, with no mention or reproduction of VOYAGES this time.

We, the undersigned, wish to make it known that none of us are working on any "full color series" for Innovation Comics or **David Campiti. John Byrne's** only involvement with Innovation Comics has been their payment to him with a stated intent to reprint a single cover illustration he did for **Mike Gustovich's** JUSTICE MACHINE comic book several years ago.

To sum up, none of us have ever worked for **David Campiti** or Innovation Comics, nor do we intend to ever do so in the future. In point of fact, only two of us, **Byrne** and **Chaykin,** were ever contacted by Innovation or **Campiti** with an offer of employment; both hastily declined the offers, although **Byrne** was assured by **Campiti** that **Chaykin** was indeed committed to the work he had already declined.

Legal action is being contemplated against Innovation and **David Campiti,** and if implemented, details will follow.

Thank you,
Terry Austin
authorized to sign for:

John Byrne
Howard Chaykin
Jay Muth
Trina Robbins
Craig Russell
Alex Toth
Charles Vess

JLA/AVENGERS: A SHAME

Dear Sir,

I recently bought issue #70 of COMICS INTERVIEW, which spotlighted the BATMAN movie. On the back cover I saw the advertisement for special editions issues of COMICS INTERVIEW, featuring **Frank Miller's** DARK KNIGHT, and the unpublished JLA—AVENGERS team-up.

George Perez is one of my favorite artists, and I have long been a fan of his work on the AVENGERS, JLA and TITANS. Everything his hand touches certainly seems to turn good. **Roy Thomas** is an enviable writer; I followed his work from the INVADERS, original ALL-STAR SQUADRON and INFINITY INC.

It's really a shame their JLA/AVENGERS will never be published. Thanks for making this issue available.

David J. Anderson
2824 W. 99 St.
Evergreen Park, IL 60642

NOT-SO-HIDDEN AGENDA

Dear Dave,

In COMICS INTERVIEW #69 you published a questionnaire from something called Entertainment Media Awareness which wants to institute a comics rating system. Question #4 asks for reasons why there should be a rating system. Nowhere do they ask for reasons why there should not be one. They obviously want only to collect such information as they can use, and they don't want their plans spoiled by having to deal with information contrary to those plans; a tactic they picked up, no doubt, from the Meese Commission.

It also seemed to me that Entertainment Media Awareness could be out to collect negative information with which to show what "bad effects" comics have. Their approach indicates that they believe that comics people fall into one of two categories, bad or in need of protection from the bad. They do not appear to understand that we have rights which they should respect. They do not believe that we are capable of thinking for ourselves, and so would do our thinking for us.

But what was most amazing to me was that you were the one who published it. Wasn't it you who told me only a couple of years ago that you had no interest in running an interview with **Dr. Thomas Radecki** because you didn't see any reason why you should give any part of your magazine to "those people" - you know good and well it was! Boy, was I mad at you about that! What took you so long to realize that the best way to be prepared to combat censorship is to come to know as well as possible those

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#49-$3.00 MICRA special issue: interviews with writer/artist team of husband/wife team **Lazar Waldron & Susan Borrowes**, artist **Sal Buscema** & Marvel's **Bob Hall** — MICRA cover!

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#51-$3.00 The inside story from GRENDEL is the all-new MAX HEADROOM comic — a special issue celebrating **Comico's** fifth anniversary — original **Pander Bros.** [illegible]

#52-$5.00 LONE WOLF SPECIAL **Frank Miller** interviews **Kaths & Kaplans**, speaks out on censorship! Conversations with the **First Comics** crew including publisher **Rich Rinehart**. Original **Kaplans** cover!

#53-$3.00 **Doug Murray** and **Wayne Vincent** talk about Marvel's THE 'NAM — **Bill Sienkiewicz** and others talk about REAL WAR STORIES and the real politics of war — original 'NAM cover by **Vincent!**

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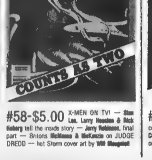
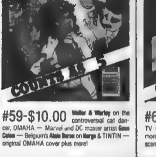
#56-$3.00 Enter EXCALIBUR! **Chris Claremont** tells why he didn't want to write WOLVERINE — vintage BATMAN artist **Jerry Robinson**, part one — a look inside TSR and DUNGEONS & DRAGONS — more!

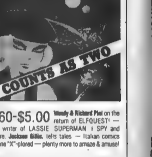
#57-$5.00 AIRBOY'S **Chuck Dixon** on the secret exploits of WINNIE THE POOH, CONAN & more — BATMAN artist **Jerry Robinson**, part two — our first interview with a dead iron inside the Marvel Bullpen!



#58-$5.00 X-MEN ON TV! — **Stan Lee**, **Larry Hama** & **Rick Veitch** tell the inside story — **Jerry Robinson**, final part — Britons **Richmond & McKenzie** on JUDGE DREDD — hot Storm cover art by **Will Waugenell**



#59-$10.00 **Walter & Worley** on the controversial cat dancer, OMAHA — Marvel and DC mourn artist **Gene Colan** — Belgium's **Alain Berna** on Herge & TINTIN — original OMAHA cover plus more!



#60-$5.00 **Wendy & Richard Pini** on the return of ELFQUEST! — TV writer of LASSIE, SUPERMAN & SPY and more, **Jackson Gillis**, tells tales — Kirkman comics scene "X"-plored — plenty more to amaze & amuse!

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people who would impose it, and their twisted concepts? Nice to know you're one of the good guys after all, instead of one of those publishers who offends readers by refusing to publish something that other people wouldn't want them to have.

Anyway, a few weeks back I sent a response to Entertainment Media Awareness. I had to overlook how their questions were skewed in order to give what I consider reasonable and responsible answers, but I feel I gained much from the experience. But it occurs to me that you deserve the chance to publish this material, since you did publish the questionnaire in the first place. (I also sent a copy of my responses to COMICS BUYERS GUIDE.)

I chose to try to enlighten the people behind the questionnaire rather than feed whatever outrages they wish to perpetrate, or indulge my impulse to vent my wrath at them. In fact, taken out of context with the rest of the questionnaire, its opening remarks could be considered a plea for enlightenment:

Many questions have been raised recently about the direction the comic book industry appears to be taking. Would you help answer some of these questions?

What follows are their questions and my responses. I hope anyone reading this will find it useful. (Additional comments and modifications of the actual responses appear in brackets.)

1. How long have you been a comic book fan?

I have been reading comics since I was a child of about five or six, which coincides with the time I learned how to read. I have also been reading books, other types of magazines, and so on, for that length of time. I have no idea when I progressed from the reader stage to the fan stage.

2. How much money per month do you spend on comic books?

This varies from month to month. Sometimes it may go higher, as when a "high ticket" item I wish to read is published, or when I locate a collector's item back issue I want. In practical terms, I spend within my means on a daily basis, saving up for those things I can't afford that way but want.

3. How many hours a week do you spend reading comics?

I don't know, really, since I read quite a lot, not only comic books. I suspect that I spend more time reading comic books than most people spend reading at all, and I am quite certain I get much more out of it.

[These three questions are only marginally related to the stated purpose, and then only if questions have been raised about the comics audience, which doesn't seem to be the case because the information requested is particularly worthless. How long you've been a comics fan does not tell them your age; how much money you spend is relative only to how much money you have; how much time you spend reading tells them nothing of the quantity nor quality of your reading.

In fact, these questions bear a striking resemblance to those which a doctor might ask of a drug addict — how long have you been taking drugs, how much do you take, how often do you dope up. I believe that Entertainment Media Awareness wants this information in order to treat it exactly in that manner, and I take great exception to that. There are worlds of differences between physical and psychological dependencies, and habitual reading.]

4. Do you feel a comic book rating system is necessary and if so, why?

No, absolutely not. I'm curious as to why you don't ask "and if not so, why?"

[I will deal with my reasons why not at the close of this piece. I chose not to go into that with Entertainment Media Awareness because (1) they did not ask, (2) they probably would have ignored it anyway, and (3) I felt that I covered a lot of that ground without making a point of doing so, in which case something might actually sink in.]

5. Do you feel publishers are giving you what you want, or making you want what they have?

Neither. I buy what I want and don't bother with other stuff. I feel it is my job to find what I want, not their job to give it to me. If I couldn't find what I wanted, I would look for it elsewhere.

6. How do you feel about the current trend in comics toward more explicit: A) Sexual situations and nudity; B) Profanity; C) Violence; D) Occult/Satanic/New Age activities; E) Attacks on political and religious figures; F) Homosexual representations; G) Tones of aggression, rebellion and death; H) Negative attitudes towards religion; I) Positive or negative reference to current issues such as mercy killing, abortion, drugs, divorce, child abuse and any others you care to respond to.

[The questionnaire format indicated that they wanted a separate response for each rather than one response for the whole category. I chose to do both.]

I believe that the medium should be free to deal with all aspects of life, and that the creators of the books *must* be free to think and decide for themselves about what they choose to represent, how they choose to represent it, and so on.

I see no reason why sexual situations and nudity should be ignored in comics; they are a natural part of life. I personally do not care for the level of profanity that occurs in this day and age, but I would consider it remarkably ignorant for any medium to pretend that it doesn't exist.

I consider violence abhorrent and I am a pacifist, but I prefer to recognize that violence exists in this world rather than ignore that fact and conjure up some dreamlike utopia for myself where it doesn't exist, since that would be incredibly unrealistic of me.

As for occult/satanic/new age activities, I believe we should realize that most often their usage in fiction, comics and otherwise is simply an extension of fantasy, i.e., meant for effect, mood, and so on. [Originally I wanted to add a further statement here to the effect that when these aren't fantasy elements, as when they have historical, contemporary, philosophical or theological basis, this usage is just as much the right of the creators as **Nancy Reagan**'s belief in astrology is her right. I eventually chose not to include that here because I felt (1) that it would only fan the flames, (2) that it would detract from the main point made above, and (3) that point was made elsewhere under a more universal theme.]

As for attacks on political and religious figures, I welcome them more than I welcome political or religious propaganda; as a thinking person, I find that I, and most people, are capable of recognizing one-sided views when they are presented, and of treating them as such. [I suspect that there are political and religious figures whom the people of Entertainment Media Awareness would themselves attack. **Adolph Hitler** and the

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LAST WORD

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Ayatollah **Khomeini** for example.]

In the matter of homosexual representations, I see no reason why homosexuals shouldn't be afforded the same rights as [everyone else] and I look forward to the day when all people, whatever their ethnic backgrounds, religious and other beliefs, sexual inclinations, and so on, will have free representation in all media.

I don't exactly understand what you mean by "tones of aggression, rebellion and death," but if that's what a book's creators are into, then that's what they should be doing. As for negative attitudes towards religion, again, if that is what a book's creators are into, then that's what they should be doing.

As for references to current issues, whatever they may be, I'm all for it, because I welcome anything I can get my hands on that may help me to better comprehend what's going on, and I am mature enough to realize that a full understanding cannot even be approached without some analysis of many perspectives.

Finally, in a general vein, I must say that while you have certainly presented a list of controversial topics, and while I have supported the use of every one of them in comic books, I don't believe that these things are *all* comic books should be free to do. I believe comic books should be free to deal with anything and everything, whether I would like to read about it or not, and that would include whatever it is that you would like to read about.

7. Do you feel comic books should use more or less of the elements listed above?

I feel that the writers and artists of comic books should be free to use whatever elements they wish, including those listed above, and that whether they use more or less of anything should be up to them.

8. Do you feel comic books should be used by creators as a forum to express their personal political, social and religious views?

Absolutely. Further, I would not want to read a comic book where the creators were forced to express political, social and religious views that were not their own, or where they were restricted so as to preclude their expressing their own views.

They don't have to say things I agree with — although, naturally, I would prefer they did — but above all else they should be honest about their beliefs. Otherwise, I couldn't respect them as writers and artists; I could only consider them hacks.

9. What do you define as immoral?

Dishonesty, repression, suppression, hypocrisy, bigotry, etc.

[First, by no stretch of the imagination is it possible to say that this question has anything whatsoever to do with the stated purpose of this questionnaire.

Second, had I chosen to fully say what I define as immoral, I would have had to go into some detail to explain what I define as moral. I chose not to go to that much trouble.

My original response to this question was: This questionnaire. I decided to change it to the above list of conditions, all of which I do consider immoral, and which is effectively the same answer.]

10. In promoting their books, do you feel publishers have leaned too far toward sensationalism and bad taste?

No, I feel that publishers should be free to promote their books by whatever means they choose, as long as they're honest in what they do.

11. Do you feel that comic books, long regarded as a children's medium, should be limited to presenting subjects suitable to all ages of readership?

No. In the first place, I have never bought this line that comic books are a "children's medium." That is absolute nonsense brought about by the tendency to regard comics not as a separate medium, but as "children's magazines." I believe that comics *are* a separate medium, and that *no* medium should be considered a "children's medium."

I believe that material suited for children can be presented in every medium, and in fact this seems to be the case — there are children's books, children's movies, children's TV shows, children's songs, on and on — and these are not taken as defining the various media themselves.

As far as I can tell, all of the media can present material for children as well as adults, and in general three types of material are produced: children's material, meaning material designed to be comprehensible to a child; adult material, meaning material designed specifically for adults; and general material, meaning material not designed for any specific age group but rather to appeal to the broadest possible range, where some items may be more juvenile than mature, while other items may be more mature than juvenile.

As to comic books themselves, I don't believe that they were ever intended to be a "children's medium." On the contrary, many early comic books were quite mature in what they presented — in fact, during World War II many comic books were produced for and distributed among servicemen, who at that time averaged in age somewhere in the mid to late twenties.

It was only during **Dr. Wertham's** attack on comic books in the early '50s that comic books came to be viewed as strictly for children, and the subsequent creation of the Comics Code Authority solidified this notion for most people — and from the mid '50s into the '60s comic books were for all intents and purposes a "children's medium."

Since then comics creators have struggled to throw off that notion so that comic books could stand on equal footing with all other media, capable of presenting not only children's material (kiddie comics), but also more adult fare.

I believe this is a positive step, and my only concern is that children's comics — which naturally many in the industry look upon now with disdain — not be abandoned entirely, because they certainly have as much business existing as do adult comics.

[Originally this answer closed with the following, which I chose to delete so as not to detract from the points made above:

And in the second place, were comics limited to only presenting material suitable to all ages, children's comics would no more fit the bill than would adult comics.]

12. Do you feel that an interesting, mature, quality comic book can be successful without the use of any extreme violence, sex, nudity or profanity?

I certainly hope so. I feel that such a comic book as you have described has as much right to exist as does a comic book which makes great use of extreme violence, sex, nudity, profanity, and the whole host of other things you listed in question #6.

13. Do you feel that the growing

amount of violence, sex and profanity in comics is simply a reflection of a growing decay in America's morality?

No, I feel this represents a growing trend in comic books to deal with [all aspects of life, good or bad], and I applaud this as a step forward.

I personally don't believe that there is a growing decay in America's morality, but rather that we are becoming more aware of the immorality which has always existed. I also question any sensibility which would define morality on the basis of violence, sex and profanity alone.

14. Do you feel that presenting in comics the "real life" concepts of situations, profanity and homosexuality are beneficial and educational to the children and adults who are reading them?

To be completely honest, this question makes no sense to me; the wording of it is incomprehensible. The quotes around "real life" render the term meaningless without further explanation, and there is no indication as to whether "profanity and homosexuality" should be regarded within context to "'real life' concepts of" or not.

However, benefiting and educating readers is applaudable.

15. What religious belief do you profess, if any?

I have very strong religious beliefs which I will not go into, as I don't see what they have to do with what this questionnaire is about. If it's of any interest to you at all, I have been an Eagle Scout for over sixteen years.

[By no stretch of the imagination is it possible to say that this question has anything whatsoever to do with the stated purpose of this questionnaire. Also, this question is offensively worded, as it implies (that they think) the comics medium is antireligious. The comics medium is as open to religious use as it is to any other use, and that's the way it should be.]

16. Do you feel that many of the industry's professionals add gratuitous violence, sex and profanity to their comics so that their product may be considered "adult" or "mature"?

No. I believe that those who add anything they believe to be gratuitous to whatever they are creating, for any reason, don't have the brains God gave a dog.

I believe that most uses of violence, sex, profanity, etc., in all types of media, are not gratuitous but are there for some [pertinent] reason, be it for mood or plot or characterization or whatever, and that most of the people who go around spouting off against gratuitous this and that are simply completely ignorant of the creative process.

Please feel free to give your comments for or against any of the subjects listed in this questionnaire. Industry professionals and publishers are encouraged to respond. [I prefer to think that publishers *are* industry professionals.]

In signing this questionnaire, you are authorizing the recipient to make public your name and all of the information you have supplied.)

Thank you very much for you [*sic*] *cooperation.*

Entertainment Media Awareness
P.O. Box 20079
Fountain Valley, CA 92728

COMMENT: It seems obvious to me that this questionnaire has been designed by people who have already made up their minds about comic books and what they would like to do, and simply wish to accrue some "data" upon which to launch their campaign. The wording of the questions seems designed to be alarmist and possibly misleading.

I wish to emphasize that I have answered everything truthfully and demand that if you use my statements, you use them in their entirety or not at all.

I wish you no success whatsoever in whatever it is that you're up to. [This concludes the responses I sent.]

Now, as for my opposition to a rating system, the simple fact is that I consider such things to be forms of censorship, and I consider censorship to be a form of evil, because I believe in truth and freedom rather than oppression. And now I feel that I should explain what I hold to be censorship:

The exercise of authority over objects or actions of communication, or thought or emotion or sensation, where the agent (person, group, other) exercising such authority does not possess said authority by reason of relation from the subject over which it has been exercised. (I expect this will be debated.) In other words, censorship is not constituted of the act alone, but also of the agent by which the act is committed.

To explain: An act of authority is anything which would have influence on the content of, the presentation of, or over the usage of the subject, other than that which is beyond any control (for example, a novel may not be printed on a substance which does not exist). A relation from the subject is defined outward from the subject itself, where it derives from the subject. For example, a novel has an author, a publisher, an editor, a cover artist, a reader; each of these relations derives outward from the novel because the novel exists; where the author is, in effect, part of the novel, and the novel is part of the author. When the statement is that the novel had a censor, the relation does not derive outward from the novel but is derived toward the novel, and the function is to supplant the role of the author as part of the novel and the novel as part of the author.

The author's relation is such that censorship may only exist where the author is not part of the novel and the novel is not part of the author, such as plagiarism. The publisher's relation is such that censorship exists beyond the publisher's right to choose what to publish; the publisher agrees to publish and must have the author's agreement with any decision regarding the novel. The author agrees to work with an editor, who may suggest changes but would enter into censorship by enforcing changes. The cover artist may paint anything, but a painting may not be affixed to the novel without the author's permission. A reader chooses to read the novel, and may think and say virtually anything whatsoever of it, but otherwise would enter into censorship by attempting to change it in any way, or the author because of it. The person who chooses not to read the novel can do nothing that is not censorship, essentially.

What it basically boils down to is this, that censorship will occur under one of three situations where authority is exercised, which are:

(1) Where no relation exists, only censorship may occur.

(2) Where a relation exists, censorship will occur when the parameters of that relation are violated.

(3) Where a relation is defined toward rather than from the subject, only censorship may occur.

The latter situation is where we find that which is historically recognized as a censor, a person with no relation from the subject who has been given the job of exercising authority over it. And I submit that a rating system would mean exactly that, one way or another.

Thank you for your attention. I leave you with the following quote which I hope you will appreciate:

"My best friend is the man who'll git me a book I ain't read."

— Abraham Lincoln.

Darrel L. Boatz
6 Hickory Bow
Macomb, IL 61455

Jim Valentino, in a letter of response to COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE, has revealed that Entertainment Media Awareness is actually one man by the name of John Fulce whose intention, he believes, is to write a book about comics along the lines of a modern-day SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT.

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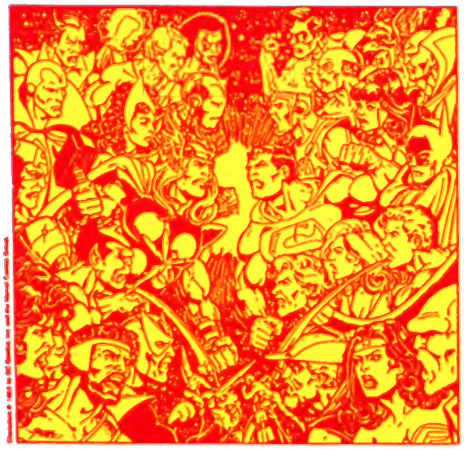

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